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SEPARATE STAR



*BY THE SAME AUTHOR:*

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SOMETHING WRONG AT CHILLERY  
THE MISSING GATES  
THE LIFT MURDER  
MURDER FROM BEYOND  
THE MOAT HOUSE MYSTERY  
ANTONY RAVENHILL  
THE MUSIC GALLERY MURDER  
FAMOUS SHORT STORIES ANALYSED  
ETC.

# SEPARATE STAR

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

by

FRANCIS FOSTER

LONDON

VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD

1938

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And only the Master shall praise us,  
And only the Master shall blame;  
And no-one shall work for money,  
And no-one shall work for fame.  
But each for the joy of the working,  
And each in his separate star,  
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It  
For the God of Things as they Are.

RUDYARD KIPLING



## CHAPTER I

"OWING TO THE *inaptibility*" (sic) "of Mr. P. Dash his serial is discontinued forthwith, and a new and thrilling serial by R. F. Foster takes its place. For first enthralling instalment see page 5."

Thus ran the editorial note in a copy of *The Removian*, a school magazine which was on sale in the early months of 1911.

*The Removian* was edited by a member of the Remove form, little more than half way up the school. Its title was modest and signified that the paper was for the Remove only. But it was read by the whole school.

The journal was cyclostyled. And it was edited by the author of that thrilling serial which was to replace that of the inapt Mr. P. Dash.

The editor was moved up into the Lower Fifth. His promotion went to his head, and he became bold. Assuming that he could get a few advertisements from local tradesmen, he could have the magazine printed. He found that he could, and he did; and the next number of the magazine—written entirely by himself—was both printed and bore a title which signified that it was no longer a "local" paper. It had become *the* school magazine.

The editor and the sub-editor sold it in breaks between lessons. They finished the day gorging themselves on cream buns in the tuck-shop, for they had cleared a profit of 2s. 9d. on the first issue, though the object had not been to make a profit.

Then the Head took a hand. He wanted to know what the financial position was. He looked dubious

about the profits, but he did not forbid the editor to continue.

"But," said he, "you might buy a dictionary with the next surplus."

Mr. Balchin, the Maths master, indulged in cynicism when he, in turn, interviewed the editor.

"With your *aptibility*," he said, "you might become a journalist."

The editor was to remember this later on. Meanwhile, however, he was too much concerned with the responsibilities of his job to ponder what Mr. Balchin said.

Being an editor was a responsible matter. For instance, after that *contretemps* resulting from the *inaptibility* of Mr. P. Dash, Mr. P. Dash sought an interview with the editor in the fives courts. It was a bloody affair and quite indecisive. It ended in the editor feeling that perhaps he had been a little high-handed, and he thereupon made Mr. P. Dash the official sports correspondent to the magazine.

This seemed to be an admirable arrangement until one day he received an anonymous communication which begged him to compare two cuttings which were enclosed. One was of Mr. P. Dash's spirited description of the last football match in which the school had played, and the other was the same description with only the names altered, written by the sporting correspondent of a national newspaper. The one, in fact, was a crib from the other.

The editor did not hesitate. Strong disciplinary action was taken. In the next number of the magazine appeared the following notice:

"On vacating his appointment as sporting correspondent of this journal, Mr. P. Dash was entertained by the editor and

*staff at a farewell dinner on the sixteenth of this month. In a speech eulogising Mr. Dash's brilliant work the Editor revealed to his audience what had hitherto been a closely guarded secret, that Mr. Dash was also the sporting correspondent of an enterprising contemporary of this journal."*

Strangely enough, Mr. Dash did not seek an interview this time, and his vacated post was given to Mr. "Juicy" Morgan, a stalwart youth whose chief qualification for the appointment was that he used to bait the "Stinks" master, Dr. Plyman, unmercifully. Indeed, he secured the position as a reward for a recent exploit at Dr. Plyman's expense. The "Stinks" master was demonstrating how water could be made from hydrogen and oxygen. Mr. "Juicy" Morgan was at the time engaged in an animated conversation with a French boy named Tridon on whether German was a civilised language—on the "Modern" side Mr. Morgan "took" German instead of Latin and was an enthusiast.

"I suppose you don't need this patient explanation of mine, Morgan," Dr. Plyman commented sarcastically.

"No, Sir," Morgan answered promptly.

"Well, suppose you come out to the front and demonstrate to the form how to make water," Dr. Plyman suggested in the same tone.

Morgan looked pained. "Sir!" he exclaimed in a shocked tone. "Oh, Sir! How could you ask me——?"

There was such a howl of mirth that the Head came along to see what was the matter. Dr. Plyman, stout fellow that he was, saved the situation by saying that inadvertently he had made a joke.

Mr. Morgan set the editor a bad example. Next day when we went to the Physics Laboratory for a bi-weekly lesson and the hefty Dr. Lonsdale asked him



in a broad Yorkshire accent, "What's wrong with your Boonsen burner, lad?", he sniggered.

Dr. Lonsdale frowned portentously. "You're not asking for trouble, are you?" he demanded.

"No, Dr. Boonsen—I mean, Dr. Lonsdale," answered the editor.

His reward was of a dual nature. The form doubled up with joy, and the editor doubled up for a different reason.

In the summer vacation of that hot and torrid year, the year of the Coronation of King George V, I—for I, of course, was the editor—decided to seek relaxation from my arduous duties with a journalistic colleague and two other friends at a farmhouse in Hampshire, on the recommendation of one of those friends who had lodged there the previous summer. The holiday was a great success, but towards the end it became boring for so busy a man as myself. One day I suggested to one of my companions that we take potatoes with us to a near-by game preserve and there light a fire and bake them. This, therefore, we did, but we could not put out the fire once it had spread to the sere grass of the clearing, and in a sudden panic we took to our heels.

We must have run a mile. Lack of breath forced us to stop. When we looked back, to my vivid imagination the whole countryside behind us seemed to be alight.

We regarded each other with dismay. One of us said: "We must go back." Both thought, "Better to perish in the flames than to run away like this!" We went back, but in less of a hurry, for we had no wind for further running.

The whole of the game preserve was ablaze. The flames roared deafeningly; pheasants and hares and rabbits fled for safety, some of them alight and all

screaming with fear. Villagers were beating the red-hot ground with branches and trying to confine the fire. We joined in.

We worked till nightfall, and at last the fire was subdued. But 400 acres of forest land had been burnt out, and on the far side the blaze had half-crossed a field of corn. Very soberly my guilty companion and I went back to the farmhouse.

I slept ill that night—and not for long, for about one o'clock I was awakened to find a policeman bending over my bed. When the policeman revealed that two boys had been seen by a hedgecutter running away from the game preserve just before the fire was observed by that same hedgecutter the only thing I could decently do was to confess. The constable bade me get up and dress, and when I had done this I went downstairs, to find my companion in crime also appparelled as though it were daytime, and a dogcart stood waiting at the door.

In silence we boys climbed into the back seat of the cart, and the policeman in equal silence climbed alongside old Bob, the farm hand, who was driving; and in this wise we were taken through that hot and scented night to the police station at Romsey, five miles away. When we reached the outskirts of the town mist hung low over the water-meadows, and it seemed to me to be one of the most beautiful sights I had ever beheld, and I knew that it would be a memory that would be my sole comfort during those coming dreary years which I would have to spend in His Majesty's Convict Prison on Dartmoor. And because of the melancholy that was on me I began to recall all the beautiful things of my life so far—alas! they were not many—further to brighten the dreary exile that was to be mine.

But strangely enough I was not incarcerated. After an hour's "gruelling" by the local inspector my companion and I were told to return whence we had come, being of too tender an age to be gaoled, which was a severe blow to my pride and which bereft that journey back to Sherfield English of any of the joy that it should have occasioned.

What would happen next, we criminals had been informed, depended entirely on what action the Squire, the lord of the manor, took. Wherefore we did some rapid thinking, and as early next morning as was seemly we went to the Squire's house and interviewed that gentleman.

The penalty was relatively light. Our fathers had to pay £50 apiece to recompense the night-watchers on the scene of the fire and also the local publican whose beer, in the absence of water, had been used by the firemen to help put out the flames—or which, maybe, they had consumed.

Now I was a most impressionable young man at that age—I was fifteen—and this unfortunate occurrence had a tremendous effect on me. I began to brood. I walked and sat alone. I pondered the enormous difficulties of life. I had had, indeed, a bad scare, for the magnitude of the fire had affected me subconsciously so that, in fact, for ever afterwards I had a "fire complex." And Sarah Jane, the twenty-three-year-old daughter of a local farmer was moved to pity so that she offered to walk with me in the deep lanes of that place and took me for long drives in the trap through the New Forest. It was inevitable that I should fall head over heels in love with Sarah Jane, for she was a comely wench, and her womanly affection was of a kind I had never known. But it was by no means so inevitable that she should fall—or say she had fallen

—head over heels in love with me. However, thereafter we walked hand-in-hand, and even kissed when occasion offered, and for two weeks I lived in a warm and delicious yet curiously painful heaven.

I dreaded the coming parting, dreaded that in my absence a local worthy who had been courting Sarah Jane for years, might oust me from the lady's affections. But she swore eternal faithfulness to the love-lorn youth that was myself, and vowed that she would wait for me. When I went back to London she accompanied me in the train as far as Eastleigh, for she was going to Southampton for a holiday, and ere we parted we melted in each other's embrace and swore our vows anew.

So this quite different editor—an editor, indeed, who had forgotten that as a journalist he was a moulder of public opinion—went back to London and to the familiar world of school. But school was no longer the same. I did not fit in. I was engaged to be married.

My parents soon discovered my changed attitude, but they were prim and unimaginative; and the consequence was that their attitude to my romance only deepened and strengthened it, so that it lasted a full year instead of the few weeks it might otherwise have done.

And because I felt so very much alone—for I might not even receive letters from the lady, these being forbidden—I sought spiritual comfort. "*Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,*" Christ had said, and indeed I thought I was very heavy laden. Although an Anglican by education and parental inducement I "found" the Brompton Oratory, and often I would go to this most Roman of all Roman churches in London and pour out my

troubled spirit in a very flood of emotion. No doubt the fact that my calf-love had been coincidental with pubescence explains this extraordinary behaviour.

It was a strange conjunction of circumstances that prompted me to seek solace in a Roman church. Although much later on I was to profess an abhorrence of mystery, the truth is that in those days the mysterious always attracted me. Perhaps that is why one day, long previously—in fact, I must have been about ten—I had gone down to the foreshore of Chelsea Reach and penetrated a great sewer which there emptied its horrid contents into the Thames!

Undoubtedly my first attraction to Rome came from the violently anti-Roman *Westward Ho!* As a healthy English boy I admired, of course, the essential Englishness of the admirable Amyas Leigh, but also I thought he was rather smug. And I hated the psalm-smiting Protestant, Salvation Yeo. On the other hand, the machinations of that other Leigh who adhered to the old faith and of those most sinister Jesuits, his companions, fascinated me. The Catholics of Elizabethan England were rebels, and rebels are always to be sympathised with. They were also social outcastes, which meant that they were not respectable—another point in their favour. And they were “against the law”, which made them heroes.

But also I think I had somewhat of a logical mind. I hated the word “Protestant” because to my way of thinking it meant nothing. “Protestantism” was a religion, which meant that some people made a religion of protesting against another one. This was rather strange thinking, perhaps, for a mere boy. Perhaps I had read it all somewhere. Certainly I had read that most fascinating of all books that had come my way, *The Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland, Shewing*

*How That Event Degraded and Impoverished the Main Body of the People*, by the redoubtable William Cobbett. I was not supposed to know anything about this book, but had found it hidden, along with Blatchford's *Merrie England*—books which a free-thinking chemist had lent my father—somewhere in the house, and in order to devour it in secret I had risen at five many mornings in succession and had taken it into Battersea Park. But this book did not suggest that Protestantism was the religion of negation; it attempted no theological exposition at all.

It was the mystery of Romanism that attracted me most. Every Protestant spoke of it in those days with frowns and lowered voices. I remembered, too, how of one young man I knew it had been said, "The priests have got hold of him." This was a very dark saying which was often heard. A person had only to disappear from the neighbourhood and "the priests had got hold of him."

Then there was a recent incident in school.

"What," young Grundy asked Mr. Balchin, "is a Jesuit, Sir?"

"Theologically or figuratively?" Mr. Balchin asked.

Plainly Grundy was not certain.

"A Jesuit, my boy," explained Mr. Balchin, "is a casuist."

"Yes, Sir. But, please, Sir," persisted Grundy, "what is a casuist?"

"Oh, come, come, Grundy!" exclaimed Mr. Balchin. "Surely you know what a casuist is? A casuist is a sophist."

Mr. Balchin turned to his books again.

"I'm sorry, Sir," Grundy bleated; "but I don't know what a sophist is either."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Balchin. "The

boy's a complete idiot. Didn't we read about the sophists in Greek this morning?"

"Yes, Sir, I know, Sir," the unhappy Grundy pursued, "but——"

"Smithers," said Mr. Balchin, addressing the immaculate boy who graced the top of the form, "what is a sophist?"

"A sophist, Sir," said Smithers, yawning, "is a Jesuit."

"There you are, Grundy," said Mr. Balchin. "There's your answer. All these problems," he went on vaguely, "are a matter of circles. Try to use your pitifully small knowledge of mathematics."

There was still another force at work in the background. In those days the controversy between High Church and Low Church was at its height, and High Church divines, even to Low Church adherents, were romantically mysterious figures who lived in a cloud of forbidden incense. They might have escaped notice altogether, perhaps, and the cause they defended might have failed, but for the fact that Mr. John Kensit and his body of earnest young men and old women vigorously assailed them at every opportunity.

One of the most prominent of these High Church clerics was Dr. Houston Collison, a great friend and follower of the famous and saintly Father Stanton of St. Alban's, Holborn. Somehow I became acquainted with him and fell under his spell. In fact, I hero-worshipped him—no doubt largely because he was said to be a Jesuit in disguise, one, in fact, who had entered the territory of the enemy only in order to seduce them from their allegiance. And he talked long and earnestly about the Catholic position so that I was confirmed in my suspicions that Protestantism was even worse than William Cobbett had affirmed.

"There is only one thing for us to do," I told Dr. Collison. "We must go over to Rome at once." That seemed to me to be perfectly logical.

"By no means," answered the Jesuitical priest. "Our duty, my boy, is to stay in the dear old Church of England and to teach to such effect that eventually the whole Church will go over to Rome."

I was a bit dubious about that. "But supposing they don't?" I asked.

"They will."

"But supposing they don't," I persisted.

"Well, we shall have done our best," answered the priest.

"But according to Roman doctrine," I said knowingly, "we shall, unless we surrender to Rome, be condemned to damnation—" or words to that effect.

The argument got no further, and meanwhile I found solace at the Brompton Oratory, and in course of time my acute pain diminished, though it was well over a year before it went altogether. By that time I was becoming aware that my father was finding it extremely difficult to pay my school fees, and so one day I sent a copy of the school magazine to the editor of the local paper—*The West London Press*—and asked for a job. I got it. Shortly afterwards I started as a junior reporter, and the magazine with its editor became only a memory.

*The West London Press* was one of three papers published from the one office. The others were *The Fulham Chronicle* and *The Westminster and Pimlico News*. I served all three. The district to be covered by these papers was about 20 square miles. In a few weeks I was "combing" it as industriously as my fellow-reporters for news.

My first job was to "cover" all weddings and funerals. These events are important to a local paper because



they necessitate printing long strings of names of present-givers and wreath-givers, and human vanity ensures that everybody whose name is printed buys at least one copy of the paper. The difficulty was to discover who was being married and who had died. I solved it by collecting addresses from florists and undertakers whom I recompensed with a free advertisement at the foot of each report.

Then I graduated to reporting fires, public meetings, openings of bazaars, Borough Council meetings, County Court proceedings, fatalities and inquests. I liked inquests. I was not especially morbid, but the very stuff of life was in the tales of passion, intrigue, poverty, despair, illness and stark tragedy which were unfolded in the three courts of Westminster, Chelsea and Fulham. Additionally the Coroner's Officers and Mortuary Keepers regaled me with many a tale that kept me awake o' nights.

One day a Mortuary Keeper wanted to show me how bloated a body was after it had been in the Thames for a week or two, and I entered the morgue. From the poor corpse on its slab water dropped on to stone flags below, and through the cracks between those flags fine-looking mushrooms were growing.

"Are those really mushrooms?" I asked.

"Yes, and good uns, too," answered the Keeper. "I sell them to——" mentioning a well-known London greengrocer. "There's plenty grows in here."

That was in the days before forced mushrooms came into vogue. No doubt, therefore, the Mortuary Keeper was able to make many an honest penny by his sideline!

Best of all engagements to be covered, however, were public dinners. Throughout the winter there was at least one dinner a week, and at such functions the Press were dined and wined and cigar'd sumptuously—

though not always on the best of fare. This kind of reporting involved my buying a dress suit. My first was from a misfit tailor's and cost, I think, £3—equivalent to £5 or £6 nowadays. It was a good suit but did not fit well across the rump. This was responsible for an embarrassing incident when, at a public reception at the Trocadero, I bent down to retrieve a box of matches I had dropped.

The months sped on. I worked hard from nine-thirty in the morning sometimes till midnight—and flourished on it. What a world it was!

There was not much I did not know about life by the middle of 1913—one can learn much provided that one learns involuntarily. I met and mixed with more people of all classes in that twelve months, I suppose, than the average person does in as many years, and perhaps learnt more of the under-surface of life than most people do in a lifetime.

But despite the long hours I had a good deal of spare time, especially at week-ends. I spent it tramping about the countryside south of London—it was much nearer, of course, in those days. I often walked 30 miles on a Saturday or Sunday and finished up as fresh as paint.

In pre-war days, as everybody knows, Chelsea was the art quarter of London. That glory has departed from it now and seems indeed to have faded altogether, for it was not revived elsewhere. I entered Bohemia when Knewstub—I forget his Christian name—proposed enlarging his famous Chenil Gallery where Sir William Orpen used to exhibit, and I went to interview him. Life became even more interesting then. I used to spend most of my free evenings in studios, and I met, I suppose, everyone who counted then in the world of art—Orpen, John, Blanco White, Speed, and a host

of people whose names I have forgotten. One of them was Mark Symons, who had to wait till post-war years until he became famous. (His Academy pictures of a few years ago, just before his untimely death, created, it will be remembered, a great deal of controversy.)

Mark was a funny little man in those days. He was very poor and lived in one room in Fulham, to which I often repaired, bringing sausages which we used to cook over an oil stove. He was always very shabbily dressed and invariably wore a straw "boater," the top of the crown of which had become detached from the rest. We used to chaff him about that dreadful hat, but he would reply solemnly by lifting the detachable crown and scratching his thin wispy hair, thus demonstrating its usefulness.

Poor old Mark! He was one of the dearest men I ever met. Intensely religious and a Roman Catholic—one of his brothers was a monk—he would borrow a hand-barrow from a local greengrocer on Sundays and trundle it to Marble Arch; there he would clamber on to the crazy vehicle and harangue the crowd on "the Faith."

All this time I kept in touch with Dr. Houston Collison, the High Church cleric. An Irishman, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, and a doctor of music, he was one of the greatest humorists of his day. Accompanied by Percy French, successor to Corney Grain of immortal memory, he was inimitable on the stage. In pre-war London a French-Collison concert was a real event.

Collison was an odd sort of man to be an Anglican priest. His main interest was the stage, and he knew all the theatrical celebrities. He introduced me to several, amongst them being Oscar Asche, a mountain

of a man whom I delighted to see sit down, for I was sure that no chair could bear his weight for long.

Collison was the man who enabled me to bring off my first "scoop" as a journalist—a big scoop it was, too, for a local paper, though it would be small beer to a national journal. An old vicar whose wife had recently died was creating a scandal by his attentions to a girl in her late teens. It was rumoured that he was to marry her. As a reporter it was plainly my duty to write up the story, but I was troubled by the idea that I should thereby bring discredit on the Church.

At that time, entertaining the idea that some day I would take Holy Orders, I was studying several evenings a week under Frank Urch, another High Church cleric. I took my problem to him. He would not advise me. Then, greatly daring, I took it to the editor, "Charley" White, who, I knew, would understand my predicament. In the end the story was written up, the vicar resigned his living, and taking another, married the girl.

That, incidentally, was my first experience of the phenomenon of an elderly clergyman marrying a young girl. I don't know whether it was a common occurrence in those days, but of recent years there has been an extraordinary number of such cases. I suppose a psychologist can explain them.

And now I, myself, became involved in trouble. One of the people whom I had met in Bohemia was a romantic and very artistic middle-aged lady—though she did not paint—who held a weekly "salon" and who always made me read poetry (my own!) aloud to her guests. She was most intent on educating me in aesthetic matters, and to this end she would walk me through those ancient streets of old Chelsea—now, alas! no more—and try to make me appreciate the beauty of blank walls and chimney-stacks and gnarled plane

trees against a dark sky. She was tireless in this education. Once indeed, she took me as far as Park Lane, then, of course, a most aristocratic place, and to prove that there was a pub in that august thoroughfare she guided me to the one at the southern end, and there I tasted Vermouth (which I thought then was a nasty drink) for the first time in my life.

Although I was learning, as a reporter, so much about life, I have to confess that I was too unsophisticated to understand what was toward—until one evening she introduced me to an American woman of advanced thought. I disliked her guest intensely, particularly as she set out to shock me—and succeeded! I hated to be thought callow, and still more, to think that of myself. And the lady called me by my Christian name at the end and became somewhat overwhelming.

The next evening I encountered my artistic mentor in Fulham Road. Dressed as usual in a gown of many colours and a hat that looked like a Mussulman's turban, she was followed by a horde of urchins from the slums of North Chelsea. She stopped a few yards from me and began to declaim her broken heart. In bewilderment I learnt that—well, I don't know exactly what I did learn, for the urchins were jeering and laughing and shouting, but I gathered that the American lady had stolen me from this tragic woman and that only death remained to be sought.

For days afterwards whenever I went to the local police stations to glean news for my papers I dreaded lest I should learn that her body had been fished out of the Thames.

Altogether it was a crowded and exciting life that I lived during the two years I spent as a reporter. It ended when, following an interview with Dr. Frere, who was then Superior of the Community of the

Resurrection, and who later became Bishop of Truro, I decided definitely to train for Holy Orders, and Dr. Frere agreed to accept me as a theological student. But before going to the Community at Mirfield I was required to undergo preliminary training at St. Benedict's Hostel, at Westcote, near Chipping Norton, on the border of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

## CHAPTER II

I ARRIVED AT Chipping Norton station in the afternoon of a dreary November day. I was cold and dispirited and filled with foreboding, for I had abandoned one allegiance (journalism) for another, and now that I had taken the vital step I was both uncertain of myself and doubtful whether I had been right.

I had noble dreams of completely abandoning the world, of entering the brotherhood that called itself the Community of the Resurrection (it was an Anglican monastic institution) and living thus to the end of my days. To devote myself exclusively to God in that way had seemed a splendid thing, but when I mounted the dogcart which had been sent to meet me and sat beside the rustic driver I was not so sure. Doubtless this was not due to any serious feeling that such abandonment of the world was not right; I expect that my trouble at the time was the regret at leaving behind me the busy, interesting and delightful world that I was to see no more.

I had a shock when I arrived at the Hostel. I had, perhaps, expected to find a cloistered place; instead I found a large stone farmhouse. And there was a house-keeper!—a woman of middle-age who greeted me sourly. The students, she told me, were “up at the barn.”

She showed me the dormitory, which consisted, if I remember rightly, of two large rooms, inter-connecting, in which were eight or nine beds. Mine was the one under the lattice window. It consisted of

boards on boxes! But for the beds and a couple of plain washstands the room was quite unfurnished, and the floors and walls were bare.

The refectory was downstairs. It contained a long deal table with chairs (or forms; I cannot remember which). There was no other furniture, unless a fireplace can be thus described. On the broad mantelshelf was a pile of popular periodicals—the only literature, I found, in the place. The window looked out on to a cheerless November landscape of the Gloucestershire wolds.

I sat down by the scanty fire and tried to warm myself. My vitality was very low; my spirits were lower; my enthusiasm had quite waned.

Let me not be misunderstood. I was prepared for austerity, but I had visualised a different kind. I had expected a quite different set of conditions—something ecclesiastical. I could have borne—I told myself—an even fireless grate and almost blanketless beds and a similar lack of adornment, had the setting been different. As it was I had to accustom myself to what was really squalor—though the place was spotlessly clean.

Darkness came. I heard young voices. Half-a-dozen—no; seven—boys between 16 and 18 entered. They were dressed in ordinary clothes. They greeted me shyly—probably because I looked so much older than they. The housekeeper put rough cups and plates on the table, a platter of bread, a plate of butter and a bowl of jam. Each boy went to a chair, reverently stood behind it and said a silent grace; then he sat down.

I had had no meal at midday and was hungry. The bread was sliced by the grim housekeeper, who sat at the end of the table, and passed round. I found that one could have either butter or jam, but not both.



The meal was eaten in silence. Afterwards we rose, and I was told there was Evensong to attend at six o'clock. The table was cleared; the housekeeper left. In a little while the exceedingly pleasant smell of toasting bread tickled my nostrils. I looked through the open doorway into the room across the passage.

That room was most comfortably furnished. There was a carpet on the floor and a cover on the round table. In an elaborately easy chair before a most cheerful looking fire sat the housekeeper making toast for her afternoon tea. A kettle steamed on the hob. A most homely scene!

It was time for service. Talking in low voices we went out into the darkness. We walked a mile along a hard road. A church bell was sounding—one of the students had gone ahead to peal it.

The church—the village church—was charming, an ancient place of peace and utter stillness. Two candle flames lighted the Sarum altar.

We boys were the sole congregation. A thin-faced priest entered silently, attended by one of the students, and went to his stall. The quiet service began.

As I knelt there in that stillness and listened to the familiar words my disillusionment left me. We seemed to be utterly remote from the world; we had travelled back in time to the Middle Ages—or rather, we had travelled right out of the world altogether. Reaction from my earlier experience set in, and I blinked back tears as I stared at the twin flames on the altar and watched their light glinting on the brass cross between.

There came a long silence before the end. I could hear the beat of my own heart, the tide of blood in my head. The silence of eternity pressed on my ears. I buried my face in my hands.

A thin thread of sound—a single organ note giving a key. Accustomed voices began to sing in a lovely harmony that most beautiful of all hymns, "*The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended.*" I tried to join in, but could not. I knelt there—for we sang kneeling—filled with the ecstasy of devotion and with all my rebelliousness quelled.

The blessing was given. Another interval of silence; then we left the church. One of the boys took my arm and guided me along the unfamiliar road to a great barn. Oil lamps lighted it. It contained a single long table, forms and a blackboard. I rightly guessed that this was the schoolroom.

The priest came in. He shook hands gravely with me, his severe and ascetic face unlighted by a smile. I sat down with the others.

I forget what that first lesson of mine was—probably Latin or Greek, for these were the principal subjects, I learnt later, in the curriculum. I knew quite a good deal of Latin and had a smattering of Greek, and in whatever subject that first lesson was I apparently acquitted myself well enough, for no comment was made.

At the end of an hour we finished evening school and prepared to leave. The priest put on a cloak over his cassock and a Canterbury cap on his head, and we fared forth into the dark of that November night once more. The wind blew chill across the wolds; the sky was overcast. So desolate was the countryside that not three lights could be seen all around.

The priest—let us call him Father John, for I have quite forgotten his name—accompanied us back to the Hostel, two of the boys clinging to his arms. He spoke little. Outside the Hostel he bade us good-night, and we went inside.

Supper was laid—bread and cheese and water. This we ate and drank almost in silence. Afterwards there was half-an-hour's recreation, which consisted in reading those tattered periodicals and talking in subdued tones. At nine the senior boy called "Time!" We all stood. New and raw I waited. We recited Compline, singing the psalm and hymn very tunefully.

Again I was strongly moved. Who with a sense of beauty could have failed to be moved in the circumstances? There in the bare refectory of that sequestered old house stood eight youths, all, it seemed, destined for Holy Orders, and reciting age-old prayers and singing ancient words to ancient tunes in the night's deep silence.

Nobody spoke when the Office was done until I asked a question; then I was warned that no talking was allowed after Compline till Prime should be recited on the morrow's morning. We trooped upstairs, silently undressed, said our prayers and silently got into bed. At once the senior boy extinguished the candle.

My bed was under the window. I lay in my rough blankets staring through the uncurtained pane, yet seeing nothing because of the dark. Because my companions were not yet asleep their breathing was subdued. Utter silence enveloped us. When at length a distant church clock sounded the half-hour it seemed to come from another world.

Half-past nine. Had I been in London now, I reflected, I should probably be in the midst of a public dinner or a political meeting, or even, maybe, at a music hall. There would be bright lights and people and noise. . . .

It was a long time ere I fell asleep. I was awakened, it seemed to me, almost at once by the clamour of a bell. Somebody yawned and stretched; someone else

struck a match and lighted the candle. The bed next to me was empty. I guessed that it was its occupant who was ringing that bell so industriously.

Then the noise stopped. Somebody got out of bed. I was shivering beneath my two blankets, yet I liked less the idea of braving the cold outside.

Nobody spoke. Each sponged himself down in icy water standing in the hand basin, and then dressed.

I had a personal problem. Ever since I was fourteen I had had to shave. How to do so now? I felt my chin, wondering. It was very rough; the operation could not be neglected. I sought for my razor—a “cut-throat” in those days, of course—and shaving brush. Watched covertly by the others, I lathered my face. I could not see in the mirror, so I shaved as best I could without the aid of my reflection.

When we were dressed brooms were produced, and the whole place, with the exception of the house-keeper's two rooms—she had not yet risen—was swept and garnished. I shook the mats out in the unkempt garden. Then some of us washed again, and finally we assembled in the refectory, and then, standing solemnly in a little group, we recited and sang Prime.

There was a cheap clock on the mantelpiece. The hour, I saw, was just half-past six. I wondered what happened next. Talking being now allowed I asked the senior boy.

“Mass,” he said briefly, “at seven.”

We went out into the morning dark and trod the silent road to church. Above the stars gleamed frostily. The church bell was sounding.

“We take it in turns every day to do the outside duties,” the senior boy told me. “To-day it's Vernon's turn.” (That name is fictitious, for I have forgotten all their names by now.) “He rang the rousing bell at

5.30. Now he's ringing the church bell. He will be server at Mass, and he'll ring the bell at both Sext and Evensong, and read the Lessons to-night."

The church was cold and still. Vernon, garbed in a cassock, was lighting the candles when we entered. He bowed to the altar and left. When he returned with the vested priest he wore a cotta over his cassock.

The Litany preceded Mass, so that the whole service took about an hour. Although my teeth were chattering with cold, the solemnity of that austere service filled me with awe.

I have since then attended services in many places—in monasteries, cathedrals, abbeys and ordinary town or village churches in three continents—yet despite their magnificence and the music, Mass in that village church at Westcote remains the most solemn circumstance in my memory.

When finally we went outside again dawn was breaking. I was ravenously hungry as we returned to the Hostel, and I hoped there would be nothing more to delay breakfast. Nor was there. But that meal consisted of only bread and butter (or jam, not both) and tea.

At nine o'clock we were in the barn schoolroom once more. A bearded layman sat warming himself by the stove.

"What's his name?" I asked Vernon.

He grinned. "That's old Stutter," he replied.

The bearded man turned and smiled at me. I went forward and shook his outstretched hand. "How d'you do, sir?" I greeted him.

"Good-morning, sir," the others had chorused meanwhile.

He had said nothing so far.

The boys sat down and produced books. Hawkins nudged me. "You haven't got any books yet, have

you?" he said. "Better ask him for them," nodding towards the bearded man.

I stood up. "I haven't any books, Mr. Stutter," I said. "Can——?"

Somebody sniggered. I stopped. The bearded man regarded me wryly.

"I w-w-w-will g-g-g-get you s-s-s-some," he said, struggling pitifully to pronounce the words.

I was furious with myself for having fallen into Vernon's trap so readily. He, a mere schoolboy, had employed the most ancient of all devices and succeeded, despite the fact that I was so much more sophisticated than he. And I had unwittingly twitted a man over his affliction. I wanted to apologise, but I was tongue-tied with shame.

The bearded man brought me books. Evidently he realised what had happened, for as he handed them to me he smiled. "My n-n-n-name's Andrews" (or whatever it was), he said.

At noon we went to church again for Sext and then walked the mile back to the Hostel for dinner. It consisted of cold salt pork (Fanny Adams, as it was called in memory of the fabled lady whose body had been found in a well) and potatoes. Afternoon school in the barn followed at once.

Thus the round of the day. It never varied except on Sundays (when there was no study, but there were extra services in church) and saint days, when, in the season, we had rabbit for dinner and went for a communal walk in the afternoon. Once or twice a week we scrubbed out the whole Hostel (except the house-keeper's rooms) and washed the windows before Prime.

It will be seen that in our four journeys to and from the barn we daily covered eight miles, so exercise was

not lacking. But there were no games or other relaxation of any kind.

It is perhaps needless to say that I had no liking for my new life. Not even the beauty of the services could atone for the drabness, squalor and monotony of the rest of the day. And although both at school and as a reporter I had got on quite well with my fellow-creatures, I quite failed to like or to win the liking of the students at St. Benedict's Hostel. Indeed I distrusted them, and I do not think that any of them were there because they were convinced of "having a vocation" for the priesthood; at least their conversation did not suggest that they were. And I was rather painfully aware that they expended much energy and time in "currying favour" with Father John: it all savoured too strongly of a young ladies' academy for my liking.

Yet I liked Mr. Andrews, and I do not think this was because the others showed him little regard. He was a most earnest man who, besides supervising some of the study in the barn, very often conducted "meditation" in church. On such occasions, when he outlined the subject for reflection and, in fact, preached a short sermon on the matter, his pathetic stutter entirely disappeared.

It was inevitable that after a time, when I found that becoming used to the Hostel life in no wise changed my first impressions, I began to question myself whether it was wise to continue. My feelings were not influenced unduly by the squalor and monotony of existence there, for I tolerated infinitely worse conditions in later years without discontent. The question was whether I really had a vocation for the priesthood, after all. The other students, as I have said, did not seem to mind about that, but it seemed to me a serious matter. The conclusion I came to was that I certainly had no

vocation for the *Anglican* priesthood, for the "high Anglican" belief which I professed seemed to me then to be a hollow sham.

Dr. Collison was writing to me regularly at that time, and now that I was no longer influenced by his personality I was becoming aware that I had hero-worshipped him without reason. His letters were full of accounts of social functions and his contacts with stage celebrities; or else he described his exploits when he went out of his own parish to preach—which was very often, for he was in great demand all over London, and it was said that many women followed him from church to church in order to "sit under him." And finally he regaled me with stories of a certain vicar and boys with whom he (the vicar) was misconducting himself, and then I recalled that it was he who had first given me the news of the other vicar who had had to resign his living as a consequence of the disclosures in the *West London Press*. Of a sudden I became aware that my idolised friend, priest though he was, was a scandal-monger, and this ended my relationship with Dr. Collison. He was killed several years later in an accident in Switzerland.

I lay awake almost all one night in intense cold—for the newspaper which I had put under my single mattress failed to prevent the up-draught from the bare floor of the dormitory—trying to come to a decision, and by morning I had made up my mind. I sought an interview with Father John and told him what was in my mind, and then I went back to the Hostel and packed my bag.

After a long walk—the first I had enjoyed without the enforced companionship of my fellow-students—I returned, and the housekeeper gave me tea of toast and buns in her snug parlour. It was odd what a fuss



she made of me. I think she must have been gratified that someone had kicked over the traces, and I believe she had disliked all of us because we were miserable creatures who were subservient to her.

So I went back to London—not joyously, but very soberly—and knowing that I had no job to step into. Yet something was about to happen—that I knew—and the nearer I got to London the more convinced of it I became. I had the extraordinary feeling, too, that this knowledge had underlain all my reflections while at the Hostel. I do not profess to be “psychic,” but in later years I was to discover that these premonitions and dreams which sometimes came to me were very real.

My first act when I arrived was to go and see my old editor, “Charley” White, to whom I revealed my state of mind. The upshot of that interview was that the following Monday I was tramping Chelsea, Fulham and Westminster streets again in search of “copy.” With gratitude I recall that not one of my colleagues on the staff made the slightest reference to my absence or my return. They acted precisely as though I had not been absent one day.

But how changed I felt! Outwardly everything was the same. Inwardly I knew that I had come back for a time. *Something was going to happen.*

Naturally as a journalist I kept well abreast of events, but there was not the slightest indication in the early days of 1914 that war was brewing.

I was at Pulborough, in Sussex, when the Great War started, for though I was not entitled to a holiday that year, I was nevertheless given one. It was the last holiday I was to have until 1920.

In those days I was a keen cricketer—despite an arm broken at that game—and while I stayed at Pulborough

I played in the village team. I first heard about the international crisis during the match. Indeed, the squire was giving me a résumé of the antecedent happenings just before I went out to bat, and I was so much "rattled" that I was out before the end of the first over.

That was on Saturday, August 3rd. On Sunday the newspapers told ominous stories. On Monday—Bank Holiday—I started on a long tramp before the newspapers arrived.

It is quite impossible to recall my thoughts as I trudged along the quiet roads—quiet because, although the day was Bank Holiday, motor cars were few indeed, and in those times people did not commonly on such occasions seek relaxation by murdering the peace of the countryside. I expect I walked twenty miles: it seemed to me then a sacramental journey, for though it was not yet certain that Britain would be involved in the war I somehow thought I might never have the chance to do that sort of thing again. Perhaps, only eighteen though I was, I was sufficiently intelligent to think with Sir Edward Grey, "*The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall never see them lighted again in our time*"—a remark which because of its poetry, and therefore because of its inner meaning, has always, when I have heard it repeated, moved me profoundly. At all events, it was a very sober young man who tramped from Pulborough to Bignor, and from Bignor to Byworth, and thence, by a circuitous route, to Billingshurst. When I reached Billingshurst, tired out and very hungry, I went into an inn and there learnt that Britain was at war. The next day, although I still had a week of holiday-making left, I returned to London.

For some months I argued with myself that there was no need for me in the firing line. Everybody knew

the war would be over by Christmas because of Germany's lack of money: even the majority of Chelsea's *intelligentsia* said this. But I was disturbed and unhappy, for I felt sure that Germany would not have embarked on such a mighty adventure without being prepared to carry it through and without a reasonable hope of success. And I was not unduly impressed by what financiers said about Germany's lack of money. History did not suggest that such a handicap prevented a long war. To ease a conscience that was becoming troubled, in November 1914 I started active work for the relief of Belgian refugees, who were then pouring into the country, and I was instrumental in adding considerably to the funds.

And so the end of 1914 came. By this time I was seriously facing the question of enlisting. I am not ashamed to say that I shrank from a soldier's life. Moreover, I not only had a horror of pain, but I was morbidly afraid of death. As a good and faithful Christian I believed that on the other side of death lay judgment. Heaven might await me, but I did not want Heaven: I wanted passionately to remain alive. As usual I took my problem into the country. In January 1915, when I was free from work I would tramp 30 miles a day, thinking, thinking. . . .

In the middle of my thoughts the reflection was constantly recurring that this was a test of my religious faith. If I truly believed in Heaven and in the idea that it was noble to fight in a good cause, then I ought to welcome the chance of dying. The result was that the seeds of doubt concerning Christian teaching were sown in my mind. The effect was extraordinary, for no sooner had the doubt concerning Christian teaching germinated than the insensate fear of death left me! I resolved to enlist.

A colleague of mine had joined the A.S.C. as a clerk and had been made a sergeant at once. He was entirely safe, for the nearest he would ever get to the firing line would be an army headquarters. He urged me to follow his example, but instead I enlisted in the Artists' Rifles, in which many of my Chelsea friends were now privates. The First Battalion was in France, so I joined the Second, which had already become an Officers' Training Corps. In three months, I was told, I might expect to be commissioned, and would be sent to France or Gallipoli automatically.

After intensive recruit training in London I was despatched to camp at High Beech in Epping Forest, and the next chapter of my life began.

### CHAPTER III

THE SECOND BATTALION of the Artists' Rifles was a fine body of men upholding a splendid tradition. In tournaments in the past this Territorial regiment, evolved from the old Volunteers, had beaten even Guards' units at military sports and exercises. Though it was what I suppose would be called a "class" regiment—its personnel then being composed in the beginning solely of painters, musicians and writers—the conditions of its life in wartime were more Spartan than a Line regiment's. When later I became an officer in an ordinary Infantry battalion I was struck by the fact that the conditions and general life that I had had to bear as an "Artist" were very much more rigorous than those of the ordinary Tommy. Our route marches were extravagantly long; our drilling throughout the heat of that 1915 summer was unending. And we slept on bare boards on the verandahs of the numerous "cafés" and hotels that High Becch boasted.

I cannot pretend that my initiation into military life was a joy to me. In fact, I hated those early weeks during which my muscles were painfully hardening. So austere was my life than when at the end of a couple of months I obtained "leave" and went home for the occasion I scarcely knew how to sit down on a comfortable chair.

I was now nineteen. Physically I became very strong and healthy, and could carry a fully weighted pack and rifle and ammunition with the best of them. Yet still I hankered after the fleshpots of the earlier life. I was shamed by the thought that among my comrades

were men who had lived much softer lives than I—our company cook, for instance, was a millionaire—yet they apparently were happy enough. I suppose the truth is that my mind was not yet attuned to the new state of affairs. And comparatively I was young—most of my companions were much older than I.

Somewhere about the middle of 1915 recruits into the regiment began seriously to dwindle in numbers, and the authorities were faced with the alternative of either advertising the Artists' Rifles or offering enlistment in it to other than members of the three arts. At least I suppose that was the problem involved. Anyhow, all journalists in the Battalion one day were ordered to parade separately. We were addressed by the C.O., who told us that he proposed to form a "publicity platoon" of such who were willing to propagandise in the Press on the regiment's behalf. I and my particular crony, one Bodimeade, volunteered at once—because, I suspect, we hoped thereby to escape ordinary parades. A journalist lance-corporal was put in charge of the platoon, which consisted of about a dozen men, if I remember rightly.

Despite our being excused many parades I do not recall that we accomplished anything until at length one of us suddenly had a brilliant idea. It was impossible, we told the "lance-jack," to contribute successfully to the Press from High Beech. We must go to London. Our agreeable commander promised to put the idea before the C.O.—we, of course, as mere privates, were not allowed to address a commissioned officer. To our amazement the idea was favourably received. We were transferred to the Depot at Duke's Road, Euston, and the O.C. there was instructed that we were to be regarded as being permanently "on leave." We must, however, parade once a week to draw our pay.

Additionally, we could draw such expenses as we needed.

Now this was a most surprising turn of events, a piece of potential good fortune that can scarcely have been paralleled by any soldier throughout the war years. I thought I must be dreaming when we boarded the train at Loughton. At Fenchurch Street Bodimeade and I bade each other good-bye, and I, still in a state of complete unbelief, went home to Chelsca.

For several days I was too much absorbed in relaxing my muscles and getting accustomed again to comfortable living to bother about work, but soon my conscience, hitherto accommodating, began to prick somewhat. So I went to see "Charley" White, and he at once agreed to publish articles about the Artists' Rifles in his three papers.

Solemnly I cut out the contributions and sent them to High Beech in proof that I was already busy. And then I went to Duke's Road to draw my pay.

Bodimeade was already there. He said that he had written an article or two which had appeared, or were to appear, in Kentish papers—he lived, I believe, at Gravesend.

"What do we do next?" we asked each other, a little puzzled.

"Suppose we go to Brighton for the day?" one of us suggested. "There are several papers down there."

So we went to Brighton early next morning, and about an hour before we returned in the evening, called on an editor and asked him to accept an article. He readily agreed.

I suppose we might have kept up this sort of life indefinitely, but I had enlisted in order to become a soldier, not to continue as a journalist. If I had wanted a safe job in the army I could have followed my *West*

*London Press* colleague's example and joined the A.S.C. as a clerk. (The poor fellow died of meningitis some time later, by the way; there are other ways of dying besides being slaughtered!)

Next pay-day, therefore, I went to the Depot with the intention of applying for a commission—for I did not like the idea of going to High Beech and asking to be returned to ordinary duty. Bodimeade had apparently been thinking as I had done, for he had already made his application for a commission and was to be interviewed by a Commanding Officer that morning. (When C.O.'s wanted new officers they used to come to the Depot and choose them from men available.)

I heard from the Orderly Sergeant that the C.O. of one of the East Lancashire battalions was coming that afternoon, so I asked that I might be allowed to parade with the other candidates, and waited as patiently as I could.

At last he came. About thirty men paraded before him. He selected three; and amongst them was myself.

I was told that when the notification of my commission appeared in the *London Gazette* I should receive orders where to report. I left the Depot soberly enough, for the 2/5th Battalion of the East Lancashire Regt., the C.O. had told me, was providing drafts for Gallipoli, and I might expect to be sent almost as soon as I joined the regiment. And Gallipoli was the least healthy of the various war-fronts then in existence.

The wait was long and tedious, but eventually my name appeared in the *London Gazette*, and a week later I reported to my new battalion at Crowborough, Sussex. The acting-Adjutant who greeted me was Captain Douglas Hacking, now a baronet and Chairman of the Conservative Party. When I first saw him



I was struck by his handsome and soldierly appearance—indeed, I think he was the handsomest man I had till then encountered. He was reserved and rather “senior” to the new junior subaltern, but he was kindness itself. He may be surprised to learn that of the thirty or so officers of that battalion I liked him best, though, because he was a senior captain, and because he transferred a year later, I don’t suppose I exchanged more than a dozen sentences with him all the time we shared the Mess.

A south countryman is as different from a north countryman as two men of different races—indeed, they come of quite different stock, for in the southerner there is much Latin blood. I hailed from “black Sussex,” that part of Sussex that is so called because of the dark hair of its inhabitants; the majority of the other officers were Lancastrians. Many of those officers spoke almost a different tongue from mine, and the slight burr in my Sussex voice—for though I had lived most of my life up till then in London, the inherited burr had not been lost—made me equally difficult where they were concerned. I was a foreigner.

It is perhaps a rather curious fact that although the men of my platoon were necessarily (because of their humbler circumstances) even more strange than the officers so that sometimes I had not the least idea what their remarks meant, and consequently I must have been even more of a foreigner to them than I was to the commissioned ranks, yet I gained their confidence much more quickly than I gained my brother-officers’. For a long time they left me very much alone.

But I am progressing too rapidly. When I arrived at Crowborough I was told to share a hut with two other officers. Baldwin, who was one of them, was the bombing expert. Before I settled down to uneasy sleep he pulled

a cardboard box of detonators, slabs of gun-cotton and bombs from under his bed and went over their finer points with his companion.

"There's enough stuff there," he said, as with careless foot he shoved assortment back under the bed, "to blow up the whole camp."

Later I was to become equally careless with high explosives myself, for I learnt there is a vast difference between the carelessness of an expert and that of a novice; but that night I was filled with apprehension.

As a newly-joined officer it was my fate to be placed with other juniors under a villainous sergeant-major for a fortnight in order to learn how to "spring to it." I say "villainous" advisedly, for if ever there was an evil specimen of his tribe he was one. His capacity for beer must have been enormous, for he was even more corpulent than John Bunny, who was then a popular film idol.

The sergeant-major had a whole-hearted contempt—no doubt richly deserved—for young officers, and he had plenty of licence. Although he never forgot that we had to be addressed as "sir," during that horrible fortnight, he drilled and cursed us more ruthlessly than he ever drilled "other ranks."

Shall I give an example of his vocabulary? Alas! I cannot possibly do it justice, for even in these days there is a limit to what may be printed.

Our first lesson was to learn how to "fall-in"—a lesson I scarcely needed since I had been a Tommy in the Artists' Rifles for months.

"W'en I says 'Fall in!'" he instructed us in a nasal voice, "I wants ter see a clahd o' dust and two lines o' livin' statoos."

Did I mention that he was a cockney, not a Lancashire man? Well, he was—or else he had acquired the cockney accent on his travels.

I was not quick enough for him. He came to me and regarded me balefully. "D'you know wot you are, sir?" he inquired. "I'll tell yer, Gawd blast me if I doesn't! You're an —— scrimshanker, that's wot you are, sir. An' don't you forget it! . . . Nah, then, gents, fall out, and try again. When I says, 'Fall in!' I wants——"

How I hated that man! The whole regiment hated him—the whole regiment, that is, with the exception of the Adjutant (who had now returned to duty, thus relieving Douglas Hacking, a tremendous contrast in personality, of his temporary job).

Well, within a short time I was a fully-fledged platoon officer and was doing well enough. But I was still a "foreigner," and as such was left largely to myself.

The training became monotonous—so monotonous that only three incidents stand out in my memory. The first was a night route march through the country south of Crowborough. I expect much of it is, unfortunately, built over now, but that route march was memorable. We went through the loveliest scenery of an Alpine character, and under the strong moonlight of the winter's night it made a deep impression on my mind. But it was not that that made the march so memorable. It was the new feeling that came to me on the return in the early hours of the morning. The men were hot and tired; they grumbled amongst themselves. The stench of sweat and leather and of exhalation filled the air. It had nauseated me at first—for rudely-fed, healthy and ill-washed men can be very strong-smelling when they are hot with exercise—but later I told myself this was the reek of mankind, that these men, Lancastrian "foreigners" though they were, were brother-Englishmen who had, like myself, voluntarily subjected themselves to this harsh life.

Much as I disliked the stench it was the honest smell of fellow-human beings. We were all going out to France shortly, to endure together what trench life offered; maybe I would share the fate that must befall many of them and be united with them in death. . . .

Sentimental pseudo-patriotic thoughts, no doubt; but that was how I was thinking that night as we marched home under the moon. It was the thought I took with me at last to bed. And it was not an "affected" thought, for by this time I had learnt to know the men under my command, and their attitude towards me inspired affection. Most of my platoon were older than I, yet so absurdly simple were they—they were mostly cotton factory hands and miners—that they always behaved to me as though I were their elder, and a trusted elder at that. I daresay that this is the impression that such men gave many an infantry subaltern.

The second incident was a Zeppelin night raid. The ground had been snow-covered for days, and the cold was intense. Some hours after "Lights Out" the Orderly Officer gave the alarm, telephoned through from Brigade Headquarters, that Zeppelins were approaching. We were ordered to take to the woods and there spread ourselves out. The electric light had been switched off at the main; there was no time to collect clothes. Like many others I spent three hours in the snow-bound woods clad only in night attire.

The third incident marked an extraordinary change in the behaviour of my brother-officers.

When you read stories of soldiers panting for the firing line you can discredit them all without reserve. Whatever other nations may be, the average Englishman is no fire-eater. However much those fellows in my battalion might talk about wanting to go to France

they were just as apprehensive about that coming experience as I was.

One day my company commander summoned me to his office by orderly. It was announced that the battalion had at last received orders for France. Apparently he had already told my fellow company officers, for their faces were strained and glum. But I pretended to be glad. I forget what I said, but whatever it was those others of a sudden looked at me in an entirely new way.

"You won't be so damned cheerful when you get there, my lad," the captain commented sourly.

Outside the office the company second-in-command took my arm. "What about coming with me to Tunbridge Wells to-night?" he asked, from which I judged that I had suddenly become popular.

But we did not go to France. Instead we entrained for Colchester, where we went into temporary barracks outside the town, there to endure more months of monotonous training.

Nevertheless I was better off than many of the junior officers, for during that period in England I went on three courses of instruction. One was at the Bombing School at Clapham, London. Sir John French (home, I suppose, on leave) inspected the students while I was there, and I have a vivid memory of seeing him dance about, as excited as a schoolboy, when we staged a trench raid and blew the earthworks to smithereens with bombs. Another was at the Musketry School at Bisley, where I was "discovered" by Colonel Richardson, the Commandant, as a pianist who could rattle off popular and sentimental tunes by the hundred on the piano (though I didn't know a note of music!). Another was at the Young Officers' School at Cannock Chase, where I underwent the most

rigorous training possible anywhere, and where I saw the Adjutant, an ex-Guards N.C.O., slit his hand from fingers to wrist on the backsight of a rifle with which he was demonstrating yet continue for fifteen minutes more to the end of the lesson (though blood streamed from the gash) without making a sign that he was injured.

Everybody knows that wartime soldiers discard morals altogether. That is no exaggeration. Although I thought I knew the world of men very well, those months at Colchester opened my eyes. One was not considered a man unless one was prepared to go "whole hog" where women were concerned, and most men acted accordingly.

But that was not all. Probably because ordinary standards of conduct had been entirely discarded, there were many instances of behaviour that were really horrible. I will give one example. A number of battalions in the division were quartered in huts, and it was not an uncommon practice for some of the officers to bring women to their cubicles. One night an officer in one of the battalions took a woman to his cubicle and let her out finally some time after midnight. The unfortunate creature was seen by a transport sentry as she left the camp and taken into the stables. Every transport man raped her in succession.

That is the sort of story that was told about Germans (in connection with Belgian and French nuns) during the war. Whether it be a nun or a prostitute involved, the crime remains the same. But I could tell worse tales and vouch for their authenticity. The truth is, of course, that nation does not differ from nation in this respect—or at least (I am persuaded by experience), Christian nation does not differ from Christian nation; such crimes are not committed by poor benighted "heathen."

The Government during this year feared an invasion, and we officers spent much time in exploring the country between Colchester and the coast so as to familiarise ourselves with it in case of operations there. To make the task easier many of us bought bicycles. I was one such. I had never ridden a cycle before, so I got a brother-officer to give me a lesson one morning. In the afternoon he was kind enough to continue the instruction. I learnt quickly and decided suddenly that I could balance myself without being supported. I tried "on my own" and triumphantly continued out of the camp. I kept on and on—because I did not know how to get off! It is absurd that one should be apprehensive of the trivial result of falling off even a stationary bicycle, yet I was, and so I would not stop pedalling. Finally I fell off when I came to West Mersea beach, many miles away!

The Government had taken extraordinary precautions to frustrate German invaders. Thus all the local farmers had orders to drive their cattle inland in the event of a successful landing, and if corn were standing it had to be fired. Not only that, but the Germans were to be fooled when finding their way to London. Believe it or no, all the signposts had been twisted round so that the invaders, instead of reaching London, would probably find themselves at Ipswich or maybe run headlong into the Thames estuary! Or can it have been a local humorist who twisted round those signposts? If so, he must have spent many days at the job.

One night we were told the Germans had put to sea. We were hurriedly marched towards the coast, and about 15 miles away, just as the summer dawn was breaking, we entered the trenches that had previously been dug for such an occasion.

We heard much heavy firing out at sea. We grew

tense. But the day wore on and nothing happened. Then at nightfall we were marched back. On the way—worn out, for I had been Orderly Officer the previous day and had not been to bed at all since the night before—I fell asleep as I marched between my platoon's right marker and the sergeant of the platoon in front. In this wise I must have covered five miles.

Next day we learnt that the British Fleet had frustrated the Germans and had, indeed, sunk several transports.

Now this is a strange story. I never learnt how much truth there was in it. All I can vouch for is that the alarm was genuine, that we manned the coastal trenches, and that we heard much heavy firing at sea throughout the day. It is extraordinary that no mention at all is made of it in histories of the war. Obviously something momentous happened.

One morning towards the end of our stay in Colchester we received orders to send out a company to a nearby village where a wrecked Zeppelin lay. It had been brought down during the night by gunfire or a British 'plane.

An amusing story is attached to this incident. The Zeppelin had caught fire, but the crew had managed to escape the flames. The airship fell across a hedge and broke its back, and the crew scrambled out. The noise meanwhile had awakened the farmer on whose ground the Zeppelin had fallen. Clad only in his nightshirt, and bearing a hurricane lantern, he went out to investigate, and had the wit at once to know what had happened. He at once summoned the local policeman. That worthy came along on a bicycle and arrested the Zeppelin crew while they were wondering what to do and marched them off to the lock-up. I think that if I had been a member of the crew I should at



least have made an effort to escape! There was a sporting chance of success, anyhow.

I spent a fortnight under canvas with my company guarding the Zeppelin and its secrets while naval ratings dismantled the aluminium skeleton (of which I still have a piece somewhere) and while many notabilities came down from London to inspect it.

At last the battalion received authentic orders to leave for France. An advance party, consisting of one officer and two N.C.O.'s per company, was to leave some weeks in advance with a view to "learning the ropes" and later acting as instructors to the rest.

My fictitious reputation of being a fire-eater had not waned (as will be seen, it actually motivated an event later on in France). My captain selected me to represent his company.

Late one night four officers entered a first-class compartment of a train at Colchester, their water-bottles full of whisky. Before they got to Dover their water-bottles were empty—yet so hard were their heads and so well could they "carry their liquor" that they were as sober as owls when the train journey ended.

We arrived at Dover about three in the morning and went to an hotel. We slept in chairs before the dying fire in the lounge until breakfast time. Queerly enough, all fear had left me now. In fact—perhaps because the day had been so long delayed—I was filled with a strange eagerness.

## CHAPTER IV

I HAVE NO intention of dealing at any length with my service in France, for the ground has been so well covered by diarists, autobiographists and novelists that it is impossible to add much that is really new to the picture they have painted—and the instinct of a journalist is to avoid repetition. Moreover, I was not present at any major action. My experience was of humdrum trench fighting which brought no glory, but which swelled the casualty lists in a monotonous way. I will therefore content myself with giving a brief survey of the events leading to my baptism of fire and a few snapshots of the incidents thereafter which stand foremost in my memory.

Indeed, I should experience difficulty in being detailed, for the truth is that my stay in France is mostly a confused blur in my mind. When I read such books as *Undertones of War* I am amazed that the authors (unless they kept diaries) can have remembered such objective and subjective detail. Perhaps, however, in my case subsequent events obliterated those earlier memories.

We four officers of the Advance Party had to spend several days in Boulogne awaiting orders. We managed to find accommodation at the Hôtel Meurice and proceeded to enjoy ourselves as best we could. My main preoccupation was food, for even at that age I had become something of a *gourmet* and during the recent months in England, owing to shortage of food, there had been little opportunity to indulge in choice meals. One of the officers—Pritchard, his name was: I think

he was killed subsequently—was like-minded, and we explored to our heart's content the cafés and restaurants of the town.

It amazes me on reflection to think what excellent food I always managed to get in France during my war-time stay there. Although part of the country was occupied by the Germans there was never any lack of food of the best quality, whereas England was decidedly on short commons. The reason, of course, is obvious. France was—and still is—largely self-supporting in this respect. To a large extent the other officers accompanied us. But one of them wanted more excitement than passable food offered. He met someone he knew, and we lost him entirely the third day.

Late that evening we became somewhat anxious about him, for we thought we might have to go “up the line” on the morrow. We went, therefore, to a café where we thought we might find him and encountered his friend instead. Tom—that is not his name—, we were told, was to be found at a certain house (wink) near a certain little bridge, and it would be as well if we went and claimed him before he got himself into serious mischief.

In much perturbation we went into the Old Town whither we had been directed. The only indication of our prodigal's whereabouts that we had was that he was at a house near a little bridge. Feeling very foolish we kept asking passers-by in our very wooden French, “*Ou est le petit pont ?*”

We were about to give up our quest in despair when by good chance a little boy who had heard our question intervened.

“*Le petit pont ?*” he said eagerly. “Me know. You want jig-a-jig.”

The strange word, I was later to discover, is part of

the *lingua franca* and is to be heard everywhere in southern Europe and in the East as well.

"Me take you jig-a-jig," the *gamin* declared, and seizing my sleeve pulled me across the road.

We entered a dark street guarded by a British sentry.

"Hullo!" I exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"The street is for officers only, sir," he answered. He pointed down the road. "That's the best house, sir."

Very much depressed, we crossed over. The front door was open, but we rang. An old woman answered.

She waited for no explanation but ushered us into a front room in which a fire burned. It was a horrible place whose atmosphere set my spine prickling uncomfortably and made me short of breath.

The old woman bawled up the stairs, while we stood awkwardly about.

A patter of bare feet; a gust of scent; shrill laughter. Into the room were precipitated half-a-dozen girls clad only in muslin wraps, through which of course, every detail of their bodies was visible. They stood in a line awaiting appraisal and selection. They postured and leered and gestured and chattered. One of them pirouetted round. In parallel rows up the back from rump to shoulder were inoculation marks, and I remembered then how I had read that girls of this type are regularly inoculated by the state against venereal diseases.

"Can you speak English?" Pritchard asked the old woman.

"*Oui, oui, monsieur*, me spik Englis'," she answered quickly. "Girls ver' nice, ver' clean, ver'——"

"We've come to find our friend—English officer," Pritchard said, and repeated the statement several times.

"You no' want girl?" demanded Madame shrilly.

We shook our heads.

The girls had not understood the talk, but they had seen the head-shakes. A wail came from them. They postured invitingly. One pushed me into a chair and clambered on to my knees. . . .

What a scene that was! There was pandemonium in that horrid room. As I look back on the circumstances I can see the humour of it and smile, but there was no humour at the time. There were only two thoughts in my mind—to collect our prodigal and to get outside as soon as possible.

I shoved my damsel on to her feet and was suddenly filled with furious anger.

"Silence!" I bawled in a parade-ground voice above the din.

And there *was* silence, except that the girl I had so rudely ejected from my knees began to sob wildly.

"Look here," I said incoherently to the old woman; "we want our friend—that's all."

Shrieks and sobs broke out.

"Tell 'em to be quiet," I shouted furiously.

"You pay me money," demanded Madame.

"You shall have money," I said, "only for God's sake——!"

Madame shrieked something. The girls subsided. At that moment the prodigal entered the room sheepishly.

I think my companions were equally angry as myself. One of them grabbed hold of him.

"You pay money!" bawled the old woman.

At last we got outside, and I breathed deeply of the night air.

"You didn't stay long, sir," the sentry volunteered as we passed him.

Next day—and very thankfully so far as I was concerned—we were bidden to depart for the front by an evening train. We were at the station, according to orders, at half-past five. The train was in a siding. We got into the best first-class compartment we could find—yet even so its centre window was broken. Five hours later the train left.

Oh, what a dreadful night that was! The cold was intense, and the train crawled. We did not know what our destination was. About midnight I fell into a fitful sleep. When I awoke finally dawn was breaking. I was so stiff and cold that I could not move my legs.

The train stopped at a station. "Bethune" I read on the signboards. Someone shouted a command that we alight.

By this time by dint of much slapping and rubbing I managed to restore some life to my legs. We clambered on to the platform. A bitter wind swept through the station. I heard the distant rumble of gun-fire.

We ate omelettes—we four East Lancashire officers—in a café kept by two exceedingly pretty girls (alas! I was never subsequently able to find that café again) and returned to the station. What followed is a maze in my mind, but that evening at all events we found ourselves at the village of Gorre, several miles from the firing line.

But this was not to be our resting place. We—my three companions and I—were told that we had been posted to a Warwickshire battalion in the support line and that we were to report to the C.O. at his headquarters at Festubert that night.

About an hour after darkness came we paraded in the street. I was so weary that I could scarce keep my eyes open. Occasionally the thud of a gun broke the stillness;

sometimes we heard the faint stutter of a machine gun. The village was in darkness.

We began the last march. On the right of us was water—that, I learnt later, of the La Bassée Canal. The road was pock-marked with shellholes, so that we trod cautiously and often stumbled. So we went two miles.

Suddenly a star-shell sailed into the blackness ahead, poised serenely for a brief moment, blazed and drifted down. Others followed. But now there was no sound.

"No lights," was the order passed along the column. We extinguished pipes and cigarettes in haste.

A sudden sharp rifle shot; a machine gun's stutter to the left; the detonation of a shell; then silence again. The front line seemed perilously near.

"Ten minutes halt," was the message passed down the column.

We fell out in the dark road. I slipped my pack straps and lay back against it, experiencing the exquisite bliss of relaxation. Through sleep-dimmed eyes I watched the star-shells rise and fall.

"Fall in!"

We marched again. A sudden outburst of firing awakened me to full consciousness.

But we were a long way from the line yet. We marched for a considerable time, till again we were halted. Then we were detached from the column, and we four officers and eight N.C.O.'s followed an allotted guide along a dark track. We climbed a height of land and reached a colder air.

A machine gun started to chatter right ahead. I heard a whine of bullets. "Down!" shouted the guide.

"Nasty spot, this," he said as we lay there in the road and the racket of the gun and the whine of bullets was maintained. "They've got it well taped."

The gun stopped firing. A dozen star-shells—Very lights, as I soon learnt to call them—illuminated the sky. As one fell still flaming it outlined the grotesque stump of a shattered tree. We continued on our way.

At length, when I was ready to drop with fatigue, we reached our destination.

“‘Ere’s Windy Corner, gents,” our guide announced, and then thrust aside sacking from a doorway and telling the N.C.O.’s to wait, led us officers down a staircase. In the dugout beneath sat an officer, a field telephone to his ear. He nodded and grinned to us. An alarm clock ticked on a shelf. The time was just past eleven.

The officer hung up the receiver. He wasted no time.

“You’re late,” he said. “Thought you’d caught it along the road. I’m Assistant-Adjutant of this lot. . . . You’re to be detailed one per company; N.C.O.’s to accompany you. You can toss up which goes to which company.”

We tossed. I was told that my company was “along the road.” Guides were summoned. We went wearily outside again.

Followed a half mile’s painful trek over duck-boards. At last a ruined house loomed in the darkness. A sentry challenged and was answered. He pulled sacking aside from a dark hole and bade me descend. He would look after the N.C.O.’s, he said. I descended gingerly stone steps in stygian gloom. I heard voices. A light showed as someone pulled aside a curtain of joined sandbags. A couple of officers sat round a rude fireplace; a third stood at the entrance of the dugout.

I introduced myself and was warmly welcomed.

“The O.C.’s turned in,” said one of the officers, nodding towards an inner cellar. “God! You look worn out. Want some grub?”



He produced a tin of bully beef and some bread. I slipped my pack and sat down on a box. In five minutes both bully beef and bread had disappeared.

Although I could scarcely keep my eyes open we talked for half an hour, drinking whisky. I had to tell them all about "Blighty," which some of them had not seen for 18 months. And finally I went to bed—on a rude frame across which wire-netting had been stretched. I had never before slept so deeply as I did the remainder of the memorable night.

One of my most vivid memories of the war years is of the following morning. I do not know what time I wakened, but immediately I did one of the officers thrust an extremely large box of chocolates under my nose.

"My birthday," he explained succinctly. "Present. Have some."

I think I must have eaten quite half a pound before I finished—not a bad effort, I suppose, considering the hour and the fact that half an hour later I ate a prodigious breakfast of fat bacon and bread.

I shall never forget Captain Bill, the O.C. of that company. He is probably dead now, for this battalion of the Warwicks was badly knocked about a little later on. He was a prince among men, and during my short stay with his company I grew very fond of him.

He took me out after breakfast to look round. His company was in support and was "taking it easy." There was not much work to do. The men were quartered in cellars along the road which ran through Festubert, Le Plantin, Givenchy and Guinchy, and they made the most of the opportunity. The front line was about a mile away, and in between the road and the front trenches was what was called the "old British line", close support trenches which had been the front line

before a "push" some time back had enabled more ground to be captured.

Bill and I went first to Festubert church. It was a pathetic sight. Only a fragment of the tower remained, but miraculously a large wooden crucifix in the graveyard was erect and unscarred by a single bullet hole. This was, I think, the single uninjured crucifix along the front line which gave rise to all those superstitious stories on the subject that one used to hear. The graves had been burst open by shell-fire, and the coffins were exposed. Through the broken lid of one coffin I saw a skull on which one of those glass-covered wreaths, of which the French are so fond, had fallen.

It was inevitable that I should compare this desecrated churchyard with those that I knew in England—a place that seemed then to belong to another life, another dimension of time and space.

The road ran along the crest of a slight rise. Its danger spots—danger spots even to my unaccustomed eyes—were camouflaged on the east by green netting which defied the penetration of the eyes of the enemy.

There was so little firing as we walked along that country road that I felt as safe as though I had been tramping through a Sussex lane. But how different was the landscape! Only a few battered walls of cottages still stood, and the trees were grotesque stumps from which an occasional limb hung forlornly. Yet strangely, there were birds.

We came to what had once been the railway station. Its buildings, like the houses, were no more. The lines were twisted and rusty. On the broken platform stood a penny-in-the-slot weighing machine, undamaged. With a wry sense of humour I put in a French penny, and "tried my weight." I registered 20 stones—a weight

I had never achieved before and have never achieved since!

That night we were issued with rubber thigh boots, and we relieved a company "in the line." The communication trenches were water-logged. We waded knee-deep in intense darkness illumined only by the Very lights.

I do not remember much about that "taking over." I watched attentively, of course, all that went on, but because the Warwicks were a seasoned battalion the routine proceeded as smoothly as clockwork. I was given a funk-hole in the side of the trench, and a bat-man was allotted to me—a new arrival on draft from England, a mere boy and very scared.

I was told that because a large part of No-Man's-Land was flooded there was no danger of attack or raid and that I could sleep in peace. I suspect that as a guest I was privileged, for I learnt later that no one in the line was supposed to sleep at night.

Next morning I gained some precise knowledge of the place. There was no continuous front line at this section because owing to the sodden nature of the soil it had been impossible to dig trenches. The front line consisted of a series of islands—literally islands—and so far as possible the intervals between them were patrolled through the night. There was one platoon in this particular island. Company headquarters was nearly half a mile distant.

The German line was about three hundred yards away. I inspected what could be seen of it through a periscope. But there was only a tangled mass of wire on the other side of that forbidding wilderness that was called No-Man's Land. In a hollow in the centre of this shell-pocked desolation stood a clump of tree stumps, bare and grim in the pale winter sunlight.

Yet strangely I was not depressed. Perhaps that was because there was very little firing on this part of the front, though the rumble of guns came unendingly from east and west.

The O.C. platoon and myself were to feed at company headquarters, and we went separately so that there should always be an officer on duty. A guide took me the first time—to breakfast. We waded most of the way through deep communicating trenches. Capt. Bill greeted me boisterously.

He was, of course, a veteran by this time, and I was raw, but because I was not a talkative person I think I did not give a bad impression.

The long wade through the communication trenches had to be performed three times a day. I was told that when darkness came I could go "overland"—if I could find my way! I never ventured to do so.

Just before sunset that first day Capt. Bill paid a visit of inspection to the island post where I was. I went with him while he peered into shelters and funk-holes—there were no dugouts because of the sodden soil—and talked to the sentries at their periscopes. At the end he, of a sudden, got on to the firestep so that he was silhouetted against the glow of the sunset. I expected a rain of bullets, but none came.

"What about it?" Bill asked me, hoisting himself over the top. "Coming?"

"Where to?" I asked him.

"I want to stretch my legs." He pointed to the tree-stumps. "Let's go and look round."

Was he testing me? I could not be sure. I did not want to go out into No-Man's-Land, but I argued that if Bill could do it, so could I. As I clambered out of the trench I had the unhappy feeling that a thousand

German eyes were watching me. Bill moved off. I followed, my heart thumping.

"This is unbelievable," I said presently, trying not to reflect that every step we took bore us further from safety and nearer to that mysterious German line. "I never imagined it was possible to do this."

Bill merely grunted. When we reached the tree stumps midway between the lines we stopped. I looked back at the twisted festoons of wire that protected the island post. Then I looked at the German line. Bill sat on a fallen branch, and calmly he lighted a cigarette.

Not to be beaten I took my pipe from my pocket. The silence drummed in my ears. From a long way off came the mutter of a train.

"That's a Bosche train over at La Bassée," Bill volunteered, stretching out his legs.

The sunset glow faded from the sky. A Very light sailed into the air along the line.

"We'd better be getting back," said Bill.

Unhurriedly we returned—unhurriedly, yet not, on my part, without the desire to hasten. Sauntering back to our own line with our backs to the enemy was a most unnerving experience for a newcomer. That island trench—that miserable hole in the tortured ground—was like Heaven when finally I tumbled into it.

The sergeant on duty grinned at me when Bill had gone.

"The captain'll be yer frien' fer good after that, sir," he murmured confidentially, and I felt inordinately pleased with life.

But not for long. Not many hours later I was crouching over a brazier in my funk-hole, listening to a sudden thunder of gun-fire and the sickening detonation of shells. I was trying to control myself. I knew that the bombardment was some way along the line, for I had,

before seeking shelter from the bitter cold that had set in, watched the flash of guns and the shell-bursts. There was no immediate danger. But the din was shattering. It was impossible to keep a candle alight. The vibration and thud of the air extinguished it at once.

I cannot describe the sensation that this continual beating upon the eardrums and brain gave me. It was that, not fear, that I was conscious of. My imagination rioted. Inevitably I visualised those engines of death made by mortal hands for mortal destruction; the great evil-looking shells rammed into the breaches and fired with sickening detonation, to hurtle invisibly on their ghastly errand; I saw tortured earth and stricken trees; I saw hail-storms of shrapnel bullets descending from each skyward burst and splintered fragments from the high explosive shells which split upon the ground; they hummed and shrieked and whistled in a hideous cacophony and shattered bodies and tore the living flesh from men.

All this I saw, and much more, but mostly I was aware of this deafening, shattering din. It was as though the very cosmic system had gone awry and all the stars and suns were in collision and hurtling fragments of themselves into the great void.

But this could not happen to the cosmic system, sanity bawled at me through the shrieking din. The universe of God was orderly, a neat, tidy procession of perfectly controlled systems. Only man was capable of this crazy disorder, this insensate destruction.

My head ached and throbbed, and my body was on fire. I crouched over the brazier, my face buried so that my upturned knees could press upon my ears. But detonations can be felt. I felt them as my candle flame had done, as the very flames in the brazier, dancing

and swaying and jumping in the windless draught, were doing. They beat relentlessly upon my brain.

A sudden gust of air, and I was conscious that the blanket over the entrance of the hole had been lifted. The white and scared face of Higgins, my batman, showed in the gap. He crept inside. He said something—doubtless to ask permission to stay—which I could not hear. I motioned, and he sat down. With eyes made painful by the flames of the brazier I looked at the boy. His mouth quivered; he trembled; his face twitched; and in his eyes was a bewildered horror.

For an hour or more we crouched there. I was numb with the effect of that bombardment; my body felt as though it had been beaten into pulp.

There is a limit to what nature can endure. The boy with a sob lay down. He had probably not slept for thirty-six hours, and despite the din he could keep awake no more.

I was not much older than he, but as I looked at him through heavy eyes anger filled me. Unreasonably I told myself that he ought to be at home in his own place with a mother looking after him. His face was that of a child who had been beaten without cause—a child suddenly aware that hate and cruelty and brutality exist and powerless to defend itself.

There had been a lull in the bombardment; now it started afresh. The boy moaned in his sleep. I felt like a woman. I wanted to save him from this horror in the night. . . .

And I was grateful that he was there. We were two lonely beings in a strange and terrible world. God was no more; the Devil ruled.

I could no longer keep awake. I lay down beside the boy and put an arm about him. The stench of his unwashed body nauseated me. He was probably lice-

ridden, I knew, but he was only a child who ought to be in his cot at home and dreaming of games on the village green; and I could do no other than let him feel that he was not alone.

And he comforted me too. That hellish din seemed somehow more tolerable as I lay there with this younger brother of mine, and his shuddering flesh grew more quiet.



## CHAPTER V

I SPENT ABOUT A fortnight with the Warwicks and then was sent back to the town of Aire to prepare for my battalion's coming—indeed, I had to arrange billets for the whole Brigade. I made one blunder. Stressing the high rank of M. le Brigadier, I asked M. le Maire for an especially good billet for him. He was allotted a corner of a barn to himself. Then I remembered that a *brigadier* in the French Army is a corporal!

When the battalion arrived I found that we had a new second-in-command. There were also several other new officers. I missed one old face, that of a Canadian who had come from the Artists' Rifles with me. He had always bragged about the manly life he had lived on the prairies, and had always spoken contemptuously of mere Englishmen. He had, I learnt, deserted before the battalion left Colchester!

We marched all the way from Aire to Gorre shortly afterwards. It was the most gruelling march I had so far experienced. When we arrived at our destination my feet, despite their long practice, were bleeding from great cracks.

We went into the line at once. I with my platoon was detailed to occupy "Death or Glory Sap" (where Michael O'Leary won his V.C. earlier) alongside the La Bassée Canal. For some reason it fell to my fate to be constantly on this abominable sap during the next succeeding months. It was on the right of Festubert, in front of Givenchy, and more or less an island. To the left was the "Red Dragon Crater," the result of a mine—the biggest, I believe, anywhere along the front.

This crater was infinitely worse than a Dante picture of Hell. Half of it was held by us; the other half ("lip" is the military term) was in the hands of the enemy. Both the Germans and ourselves had dug saps towards the centre, and the sap-heads in some places were less than twenty yards apart. When a sentry looked into his periscope he saw framed therein the head of "Jerry" opposite, looking through his.

Yet both sets of saps had barbed wire entanglements in front of them—as I was later to learn to my cost. Wiring parties went out each night from both sides. They could almost have shaken hands with each other across the intervening distance.

For the time being this crater was probably as safe as any place in the line, for so near were the opposing sides that bombardment was almost impossible, and the Germans and ourselves realised the folly of lobbing bombs at each other.

But underground——!

Every sap had its mine passage in which engineers were constantly at work. I suffer now from claustrophobia as a result of penetrating one of them once and, under the German lines, watching high explosives being laid. We knew that the same thing was happening under our line and that the firing of one mine would probably detonate all of them on both sides. A thoroughly insensate business.

In "Death or Glory Sap," however, we were about 250 yards from the enemy, and life as a consequence was most lively.

During my second spell in the sap, emboldened by the comparative stillness, one evening before the Verey lights began to rise, and remembering my exploit with Capt. Bill, I took my sergeant out into No-Man's-Land exploring. But we had to crawl on our stomachs, for

there was no "dead ground" here. After that we went out, he and I, every evening, though very foolishly, to see how far we could get to the German line. I shiver now when I think of the risk we ran.

But these excursions enabled me to learn a great deal about the topography of No-Man's-Land which was very useful when, later on, we had to start patrolling.

Already we had regular patrols linking ourselves with the nearest "island." Each consisted of three men. One night, during the second spell in the sap, I received a telephone order to take out half a dozen men and try to discover whether the Germans were pumping water from their trenches—we had been persistently flooding them, it seemed, and the authorities wanted to know to what extent. I was bidden to count the pumps!

Oh, those awful patrols! The season was now mid-winter, and the ground was frozen hard. I remember one night later on when I had to take out three patrols. I could change the men each time but not myself!

The first patrol left about two hours after darkness fell. We had to count pumps at work. Despite the Verey lights we were able to cross the intervening space on foot instead of crawling—though every time a flare went up we had to stand rigid lest movement betray us—but outside the German wire we had to crawl. Very soon our hands were frozen so that we could not feel anything. We crawled about half a mile in this fashion and then turned back. Suddenly I thought I heard voices and halted my companions. A German wiring party was at work. The men looked gigantic in the gloom.

I whispered an order to crawl to the right, back to our line. We started—and were heard. Immediately the Germans bolted to their trench.

"Run for it!" I commanded the nearest man, knowing that he would pass the message.

Unfortunately I did not obey my own order. I delayed a moment to try to memorise for future use the position of the gap in the wire through which the wiring party had gone to their trench. A thud beside me. I flung myself flat, guessing that a bomb had been thrown. Just in time. The explosion seemed to be right on top of me. Stunned, I started to crawl.

When I got back into the sap it was to be met by a signaller who said that orders had come that I was to take another patrol of six men out to ascertain whether the German wire had been cut by a bombardment earlier in the day!

But meanwhile I had to thaw out my frozen hands. Senselessly I held them over a brazier. For the first time in years I wept in the awful agony that ensued as life came back to my veins. My batman almost took me in his arms, so upset was he!

So out I went again with six fresh men. No crawling this time if I could avoid it! We crossed the intervening space without incident, to the spot, the map reference of which had been communicated by the signaller. The wire was intact. I wondered whether I had made a mistake in the compass bearing, and thinking I might be too far south I took the patrol further to the north.

In that intense darkness it was impossible to tell whether we took a straight path. All we could do was to proceed round the fringe of barbed wire. For some reason there was a plenitude of Verey lights, and we had to go on our hands and knees.

I could find no gap. I thought we had better return. But behind us firing had, of a sudden, broken out. I judged that it would be better to take a diagonal course

to "Death or Glory Sap" instead of going back along the German wire as far as the canal and then crossing at right angles. I looked at the stars for one that would be a guide—for it were folly to try to keep one's direction otherwise in the dark, and to proceed by compass bearing is a slow and difficult business in such circumstances.

We started in file a couple of paces apart. I thought it safe to tell the patrol to get on their feet. At once half a dozen flares went up. We stood rigid. A shot was fired. A bullet whined past my ear. There were several more shots. "Run!" I passed the order, and went to the front in order to lead in the right direction—to be brought up with a jerk as I encountered barbed wire.

I had no time to give a warning. The whole of the patrol blundered on to that wire. It was hung with tin cans, the idea being that should anyone try to penetrate it, the noise of the cans would give warning. At once, therefore, our presence was advertised. A score of flares ascended and lighted up a fantastic sea of wire.

As desperately we tried to release our prisoned clothing from the barbs I recognised the place. We had blundered on to the edge of the Red Dragon Crater, and so far as I could see we were mid-way between the opposing forces.

We had been heard! A shot sounded. And it came from our own line! I shouted, "Friend—East Lancs!", and the answer was a burst of Lewis gun fire. Sparks flew off the wire as the bullets struck it. One of my men cried out—he was hit.

Meanwhile I had freed myself. With the help of another man I managed to wrench the wounded man off the wire. He had been hit in the arm. We were all free now. "Down!" I shouted.

We lay still while the stream of lead from the Lewis gun was pumped over us. It stopped suddenly, and save for a desultory shot or two there was no sound.

I did some quick thinking. It seemed to me madness to try to get to our own line here, for if in this stillness I again shouted that we were a British patrol the Germans, who had so far been quiet, would at once start firing. The only thing to do was to retire.

I whispered instructions to the man nearest me. He was the wounded fellow. When he had passed the message on I asked him if he could manage to crawl. He assured me that he could.

So we withdrew. I had my bearings now and knew how to proceed. We must have been within a few yards of the sap-heads yet by some miracle we managed to get away without further mishap. Twenty minutes later we tumbled into our own trench.

I was exhausted, and my nerves were so tightly keyed up that I felt as though my head would burst. I flopped on to the firestep while my batman, watching me anxiously, peeled off my sodden gloves. Meanwhile the wounded man had been taken away.

A signaller came along the trench. "Sorry, sir," he said, and handed me a message, shining a torch on to it so that I could read.

"Regret wrong map reference given AAA," I read. "Gap in wire is at—AAA.—Please report condition."

I had no alternative but to take out another patrol, for I was the only officer in "Death or Glory Sap."

This time I found the gap without difficulty, but by the time I was ready to return the darkness was thinning. I knew that dawn was not far off and that the German troops, no less than ours, would be "standing to"—

for on both sides troops "stood to" for an hour before dawn and an hour before sunset each day, these being conventionally the chief danger periods.

There was no time to waste.

"Back as fast as possible," I ordered. "No crawling."

We turned our backs on the enemy and started to run. At once came rifle-fire. And now my earlier explorations in No-Man's-Land bore fruit. I knew there was a disused shallow trench running from this point towards our own line. I led the way into it, and crouching low we clambered over the debris in it, and floundered through the half-frozen mud.

We got back without accident and dropped into our trench. I was utterly worn out. I had been on patrol practically all night, responsible for six lives on each occasion that I had gone out, and the errand in each case had been to our minds futile. An aeroplane on the morrow could easily have obtained all the desired information without risk.

There was no doubt, however, that this was a quiet part of the line, which is to say that while I was there there were no major engagements. But casualties were heavy, most of them being the result of *minnenwerfers*. Punctually every afternoon the mortar firing would begin. We all "stood to" at that time. We could hear the faint "plop" of the machine that hurled the giant bombs, and then we would strain our eyes looking upwards in order that we should see the hurtling monster which, when it fell, would demolish many yards of trench. It was usually seen at the top of its high trajectory. "Falling left!" or "Falling right!" we would yell, and run round the fire bays in the opposite direction. Once we failed to see the bomb though we could hear the menacing snarl of it as it sped on its tumbling flight. It was very near when I realised that it was right over

us. Too late I bawled a warning. With a shattering crash more devastating than that of any shell, it landed on the parapet.

We had to be dug out afterwards.

Later on we moved south of the La Bassée canal to the famous brickstacks of Guinchy. This was a nightmare of a place. There were about half a dozen brickstacks—gigantic pyramids not unlike in size and shape the clay heaps that ruin the beauty of southern Cornwall. At that time we held eight of those stacks and the Germans four. They were shelled continuously by both sides—and it seemed futilely. Little impression was made on them, and there were relatively few casualties because the troops were deep underground in tunnels.

When we relieved a battalion under the brickstacks and descended into those deep tunnels the stench of death was almost overpowering, even to the seasoned troops which we had by this time become. There were large dugouts on each side of the tunnels, and in these the men were quartered. At the far end short saps ran out towards the German stacks. These were manned by sentry groups. Raids were frequent. Almost every night prisoners would be taken from these posts. Because of the narrow saps it was impossible to rush up a sufficient number of men for defence when an attack was made. I remember one night seeing a sentry lifted bodily out of a sap-head by a raiding party. But we did exactly the same thing ourselves when we could.

I hated those tunnels and those death-traps at the far ends. Still more I hated having to sleep in the awful stench of those foul dugouts. They were tombs, and they had harboured many dead.

Several weeks later we moved north again on the far side of the Red Dragon Crater to other island trenches.



The officers whom I relieved in the front line told me that I should find my dugout—a mere hole in the parapet—in a disused and water-logged trench that was patrolled nightly over the top. I went to inspect it. The hole had the dimensions externally of a modern fireplace.

This was on April 13th, 1917, as I remember well, for the date was that of my twenty-first birthday. That morning I had received a slab of chocolate from home as a present.

In stygian darkness I floundered late at night through the mud and water of that disused trench to my funk-hole. It was against orders to sleep at night in the line, but I had been awake for 36 hours, and I knew that nothing untoward was likely to happen—a seasoned soldier could read the signs and portents of trouble or a peaceful night as well as any English shepherd can, by observing the evening sky, tell the night's and the morrow's weather. The night was moonlit. Not even a raid was possible.

How to get into that funk-hole? There was not even room to kneel in it. I went in feet foremost, using my torch because of the rats. I found inside a wire-netting bed raised three inches or so from the ground. It filled the entire hole, which, indeed, just accommodated a human body and that was all.

For supper I ate a quarter of the slab of chocolate. The remainder I put in my haversack, which I used as a pillow.

In the morning I found that rats had completely finished that chocolate, under my head though it had been.

It will be observed that in this narrative of my service in France I am recording only minor incidents. That is because, as I have said, there is nothing new that I

can add to the stories of fighting, hardship and horror. Also I am dealing only with the outstanding incidents in my recollection. It is perhaps strange that what stands out chiefly in my memory are the comparatively insignificant details. Why this should be I do not pretend to know. Perhaps it is because a veil has been drawn over the rest by my subconscious self.

Before I record the end of my service in France I would like to narrate the story of the bravest act that I have ever known—or read of. I have often heard elaborated versions of the tale since—and doubtless many readers will have done, for it became a legend—but these are the simple, unvarnished facts.

A wiring party went out from a neighbouring battalion one night. The Germans were unusually nervy, and they sent up a continual stream of flares. To avoid detection it was imperative when a flare was at its height, or falling, either to lie flat on the ground or to stand rigid, if one had no time to get down, for the least movement in that incandescent light would betray one.

The opposing trenches were close together, and the flares from one side sometimes descended into the other's territory. One such flare reached the top of its trajectory right over the wiring party. Some of the men fell flat: the remainder stood rigid. The flare fell—right on to a recumbent man. And lest sound or movement betray his comrades' position he lay still while the flare burnt a great hole in his back. I was told that only one groan escaped him.

He was already dying when he was taken into the trench. In his mouth he had stuffed the end of his muffler to stifle any cry of pain he might make.

Such acts of unpremeditated heroism were everyday affairs; they rank much higher than the heroism of battle.

Somewhere about the beginning of April 1917, when spring had already come to France, I shot a man in cold blood. We had been much troubled by a sniper since dawn, and I had all the men studying the German line through periscopes in an endeavour to "spot" him while my sergeant and I did the same thing through a gap in the parapet. A single shot sounded, and I located where it came from. It must be the sniper, I thought. And sure enough it was. Looking through binoculars, I could see where he lay in a depression in the ground. I took the sergeant's rifle, levelled it and fired.

"What are you doing?" The question was asked in a rasping voice behind me. I recognised it at once—the C.O.'s. (A new man was now in command, our colonel having been invalided home.)

"Firing at a sniper, sir," I answered.

The C.O.'s face was angry.

"Why?" he snapped.

"Because he's been at us for days," I said. "He got two of my men yesterday."

"But why are *you* firing at him?"

"Because I happened to spot him, sir."

"You could have got a man to shoot him."

I stared at the C.O. in bewilderment. "But why should I, sir?" I asked. "Besides, it would have been difficult to point him out to anyone else."

"Understand this, my lad," the Colonel said. "You are an officer, and an officer is not supposed to handle a rifle."

I was quite sure that this was nonsense, but I knew the folly of arguing with him. One senior captain had recently got into his bad books and had been relieved of his company. So I said nothing.

"You can go, Sergeant," the C.O. told my companion, and when the man had left us: "Foster," he went on, "will you volunteer to lead a raid? Your company commander has recommended you."

My reputation for being a fire-eater, which had started in Crowborough months before, had not died down, you see. I was feeling sore as a result of the stupid "telling off" I had just received and felt anything but flattered by his singling me out. Moreover, I had not the least desire to lead a raid, for there was a belief all along the front—or, at least, in this sector—that the officer who led a raid never came back. But to refuse the honour would have been to suggest that I was afraid—as, indeed, I was. And so for fear of being thought afraid I at once said "yes."

"It won't be yet," the C.O. said. "Before it happens you and the men concerned will go behind the lines for training."

It was a month later before this took place. Meanwhile, when the battalion went out of the line into rest billets at Guinchy, my platoon was ordered to garrison a "Keep" in the support line.

A "Keep," I should explain, was a fortified post at a point of tactical importance. It had to be held at all costs, and no retirement from it was allowed. My men grumbled at losing a spell in rest billets, but I told them that we would have nothing to do except maintain a single sentry post and they became reconciled.

The Keep was the remains of an old house on the La Bassée Road south of the canal, and it stood on the crest of a rise. Beneath it was a gyroscopic underground railway used, I believe, for the conveyance of rations to the front line, though of this I cannot be sure, for the existence of this railway was most secret, and no information was given me.

The place was heavily mined. Permanent instructions in my dugout told me that if the Keep was in danger of falling into enemy hands the officer in charge—myself, while my platoon was there—was to press down the lever alongside the wire-netting bed and so detonate the mine. The garrison would, of course, perish with the Keep.

That lever haunted me. So much did I fear accidentally touching it in my sleep that I ordered my batman to unscrew the bed and shift it to the other side of the dugout! And even then I was uneasy, for I thought this lever was so much on my mind I might sleep-walk and press it down while unconscious.

The Keep, as I say, was at the top of a rise. It was constantly shelled, but we had deep dugouts and seemed to be safe enough though I feared that a direct hit would detonate the mines beneath.

Every night at sunset “knife-rests”—structures of wood and barbed wire—were placed across the road and a sentry posted alongside. At the nightly operation I used to gaze down the road where it descended, scarred and pot-holed, into No-Man’s-Land and crossed the German trenches to the distant town which I could see through my binoculars and from which, when the wind was easterly, I could hear the clank of trains. The road fascinated me on those quiet evenings when darkness was falling and flares began to rise into the air. The untrodden way between the Keep and the point behind the German line where, I supposed, was a similar fortification was in truth a ghost-road. One day, perhaps, when the tide of battle surged eastwards troops would swing along it, but till then it was an eerie, sombre highway haunted by those who had fallen in it when the Germans had advanced to their present line.

At times when there was no bombardment the Keep was a solemn place. We could show no lights, of course, and utter silence prevailed—until the rumble from the underground railway signalled the passing of another mystery train.

We stayed in the Keep ten days before we were relieved, and then I was told to take my platoon to a château at Gorre and train for the coming raid.

## CHAPTER VI

THE FINAL CHAPTER of my service in France began inauspiciously, for I found I was suffering from sickness of some kind. Not until the raid was over and I was in hospital did I learn that the trouble was trench fever. I did not like to report sick, although I felt very ill, because I dreaded the idea that my doing so might be misrepresented.

We started to train, therefore. The programme of the raid had been outlined to us. Two Royal Engineers were to accompany the party in order to blow up the enemy wire and make a gap for us to pass through. They were to use a "Bangalore Torpedo," which consisted of a long casing of high explosive in sections. One section would be pushed through the German barbed wire, and another screwed into it like a section of a sweep's broom handle; this would be pushed in, and then another section would be added—and so on until the torpedo had penetrated the full depth of the wire. I wondered what would happen if a German sentry saw the end of the torpedo protruding from his side of the wire entanglement!

Then at zero hour, when the raiding party, having crawled across in the darkness, had assembled ready for the raid, the cock at the end of the torpedo would be turned by an Engineer at the same moment as a hundred guns began to put over a "box barrage" and so isolated the place we were to attack. Then we would pass through the gap, blow up the trench with bombs on one side and proceed along in the opposite direction destroying dugouts and taking prisoners. It was all very simple!

The raid would take place at midnight on May 14th; we had a week in which to train. That meant, if I met the fate of most officers in similar raids, that I had exactly seven days to live. For five days we trained hard, although I was sorely tried by the fever on me. Particularly it affected my stomach. On the sixth night there was to be a full dress rehearsal of the barrage. Some time after darkness fell we marched into the line to the trench from which we were to take off and lined up there as though we were "going over the top." At zero hour the barrage started. The bombardment was terrific. All the guns on the western front seemed to be at work and concentrating on the one spot. The roar behind us as the shells were fired, the scream of shells overhead and the thudding crashes of their explosions in front of us formed an unforgettable experience. The flash of the explosions showed us how the barrage was being laid. Hundreds of flares went up from the German line, and we could see all their wire in its sombre disarray.

It was over at last. And now the German gunners were retaliating and also rifle and machine gun fire sprayed a rain of death along our front. Soberly the raiding party turned and, crouching low to avoid the fusillade, went along the communication trenches back to Givenchy.

It was very late when we began the return march to Gorre along the canal bank. I felt very ill. I expect I had a high temperature—trench fever, like the later Spanish influenza that was to devastate us at the end of the next year, produced most alarming symptoms of that nature. I marched as though in a dream, aching all over and particularly in my belly.

The need to evacuate became urgent. I told my sergeant to carry on and fell out to the side of the road.



The guns had stopped. In a deep silence I went into a neighbouring field and painfully relieved myself. Afterwards I sat down, exhausted and my head swimming. I suppose I must have stayed there half an hour. Then I got on to my feet and went wearily back to the road.

And now I became aware that there was no longer silence. The air was full of sound—of birds singing. On the other side of the canal, where there were woods, were literally scores of nightingales.

This was no dream, no delusion. The chorus of the birds was the most remarkable phenomenon I can recall. Not only that, but in the bank alongside which I walked—staggering because of the fever that was in my blood—were a multitude of glow-worms.

If on the morrow I was to die, I told myself, I was being given a good "send-off."

I began to walk along the road. Heavy-eyed and faint I tried to pick my way through the darkness. Sometimes I seemed to fall asleep; sometimes I talked to myself to keep myself awake. And then of a sudden I fell into a shell-hole and had no strength to rise. Nor did I want to get up. All I wanted to do was to sleep.

I do not know how long I lay there, but presently I became aware of a sound. I tried to identify it. Eventually I did. It was the chug-chug of a heavy motor vehicle—a lorry, without doubt.

I managed to hoist myself on to my knees. The lights of the lorry fell on me, and I heard brakes applied.

"Wot's up, mate?" called the driver, scrambling down from his seat.

I tried to tell him what had happened.

The driver lifted me on to my feet and supported me. Then:

"Lumme!" he exclaimed. "It's an orficer. 'Ere,

steady, Sir! Looks like you've taken too much on board, Sir!"

I shook my head. "Can you give me a lift to Gorre?" I managed to say.

"Betcher life!" he answered cheerfully. "I've got a little something that'll do you good too, sir. There's a tot o' rum in me haversack."

He half-lifted me on to the driving seat and climbed in beside me.

"Good stuff, ration rum," he commented as he poured some down my throat. "That puts lead in the pencil, that does! Now what abaht a bit o' tucker? Got some bully beef in 'ere, I have, Sir——"

But I shook my head. I could not speak because the fiery rum had caught my throat.

The driver put his engine into gear, and I lolled back against the hard back of the unaccustomed seat. Now I could sleep. I was in Heaven—or, at least, Heaven had no softer seat than this, no nectar like that fiery rum, no peace such as this drowsiness which was submerging me.

My head must have lolled against my companion. He grunted something and grumbled. Then he put his arm about me and steered the cumbersome lorry with the other along the shell-scarred road.

But I knew nothing of his task, for so soon as his arm was about me I went straight into Heaven and slept with God.

I do not remember much about the arrival at the château, except that I took two aspirins and tumbled straight into bed.

I woke late next morning. The day was Sunday—my last on earth, if the popular idea about trench raids was true. I felt wretchedly ill, but at last I got up. The fever seemed to have abated. I was giddy, but better than I had been last night.

The hour was ten o'clock. At eleven the padre was coming to administer Holy Communion to the raiding party. I called my batman and began to dress.

I went to the service soberly enough because of the circumstances, but somehow I was not apprehensive about what was in store for me. I suppose that having faced death almost every day now for months I lacked sensibility, but I think the real reason was that I didn't mind very much whether I died or not.

Now that, I think, is a strange matter. I do not pretend to be able to understand it. I can only ascribe it to a sense of fatalism which, in later years, was to become most pronounced. I believed in God—though that was all—, and my reason told me that my destiny was in His hands. I must, believing that, have no qualms about what might happen.

And how right I was! Looking back now and tracing effect back to cause I can see that my simple act of accepting the C.O.'s invitation to lead that raid motivated all the subsequent major events in my life. But for that refusal to try to interfere with destiny I should almost certainly not have taken a later step which caused me to go East. But for that acceptance of what seemed to be destiny I should probably have been killed a little later on at the Somme battles in which my battalion were almost wiped out.

Well, after Holy Communion that fateful morning I wrote a letter home and gave it to the padre to despatch should I be killed; otherwise it was to be burnt. I think that I was inspired now only by a dramatic instinct, for I cannot even remember what the letter contained.

Outside the hut where the service was held, one of my platoon was waiting for me. He was the foulest-mouthed man I ever knew, a miner in civil life, who

used to enliven his comrades in the trenches with the most luridly indecent songs of his own composition. As a private he was not, of course, supposed to speak to an officer without first being presented by an N.C.O.—what a particularly stupid rule that is!—but Hargreaves was a law unto himself.

“Sir,” he said to me when I joined him, “to-night thou shalt be with me in Paradise.”

I was half-shocked, half-amused. He grinned familiarly. “Perhaps you won’t be, however,” he said in the Lancashire dialect which I will not try to reproduce. “I expect you’ll be in hospital.”

The day wore on slowly. At nightfall we filled our packs with our scanty belongings and handed them over to the Quartermaster-Sergeant, who had called with a limbered wagon for them. Then we blacked one another’s faces with burnt cork so that they would not show up in the darkness later on, and I made a stout club for myself of an entrenching tool handle bound tightly round the top with villainous barbed wire. The men would be armed with rifles, but I had only my revolver, and this would be useless when all its chambers were empty. A club was the soundest weapon.

It is queer how in close fighting men return to primitive weapons. I have seen men fling away their rifles when they were at close quarters with the enemy and use their entrenching tool handles or their feet and fists. At close quarters a rifle is a handicap, despite training in bayonet fighting, rather than an advantage.

And we filled our pockets with bombs—I remember I carried fifteen.

At last a motor bus arrived—one that had been taken off the London streets, possibly the famous “Old Bill” itself—to convey us up the line. We clambered aboard and, singing, began our journey.

We were conveyed to Givenchy, and there the C.O. met us. He had a jar of rum beside him and he held a mug. To each of us, there in the darkness, he gave a stiff measure. We entered the communication trench and filed in silence to the front line. Once I stumbled into water. It was Hargreaves who pulled me out.

"I'll look after you, Sir," he said paternally. "Never you fear."

We reached the front line. I looked at my watch. Half an hour to wait.

The night was silent and very dark. I began to worry. Suppose I failed to find the right spot? I had left compass behind, for I knew No-Man's-Land intimately at this point by now and should not need it. Yet I worried. My body ached with suspense. I wished time did not go so slowly. Only five minutes had passed so far.

I busied myself whispering last-minute instructions, fussed over the Bangalore Torpedo, which the two engineers carried in sections.

At last it was time to start. Thankfully I went "over the top," followed by the men. We must take no risks of spoiling the raid, so we crawled.

We had gone about a hundred yards, I suppose, when I sensed movement in front. I whispered a warning to the men behind and peered into the gloom. Silence. Utter stillness. I crawled further forward—and saw a man on the ground in front of me. There were others behind him—two. The whites of the faces showed in the darkness, whereas mine was blacked and, I knew, could not be seen. I saw the squarish shape of a German forage cap. A Bosche patrol, without a doubt.

One can think quickly in emergencies. If these men got away and gave the alarm the raid would be ruined. But I could only tackle one of them, and my men were

in file behind—no; not altogether, for Hargreaves had crept alongside.

“Jerries!” he breathed in my ear.

I judged the distance and brought my right arm cautiously back so as to give force to the knock-out blow that I must deliver to the nearest German. I could not whisper an order, but I judged that either the other two Germans would at once surrender, or that my men would deal with them.

I struck as hard as I could on that square forage cap. A frightful yell followed the blow. One of the other two men fired a pistol straight in my face but missed me.

There was pandemonium in the German line at once. A dozen flares went up. I heard voices. Whatever happened we could wait no longer, for zero hour for the guns was very near. We went forward. With flares going up all along the German lines and rifles barking at us, we reached the barbed wire, and what is more, we had hit the right spot at once. The Engineers began to thrust the Bangalore Torpedo into place. They reported that it was ready.

I was looking at the illuminated dial of my watch, which had been carefully synchronised with the gunners' earlier. Half a minute more. Twenty seconds. Fifteen. Ten. Five. Three.

“Right!” I said.

Nothing happened.

Zero!

The guns started. The torpedo remained mute. The engineers were struggling with the cock. Seconds passed—seconds during which we should have been getting through the gap the torpedo had made. I was desperate. The bombardment would have put the Germans on the alert. If we could not take them by surprise we should fail to get into their trench.

"Here, let me do it!" I bawled above the din, and thrust an Engineer to one side. I wrenched at the cock. With an explosion that must have been heard twenty miles away and which would have wrecked a dozen houses the torpedo detonated. And I received the blast of it full in my face.

I was on my feet, but I could not see. The thunder of the guns and the crash of explosions over and on the line thudded against my body. But I could not see. I was blind!

I felt men about me, went forward with them through the gap, blinking and struggling for sight. Then I was alone. I felt in front with my foot for the edge of the trench. Then again I felt someone alongside.

"It's Hargreaves," a voice bawled in my ear.

At that moment something fell on my foot. I kicked lustily, guessing it was a bomb. It exploded. My right arm went numb, and my left side burnt. I stumbled against a body.

Somebody grabbed my injured arm and pulled me backwards. Bombs were falling all round us, and the blasts from the explosions made me stagger. And still I could not see.

Without an officer as they were—for I was helpless—the men were falling back. The raid had been ruined, anyhow, by the Bangalore Torpedo's failure to detonate precisely at the right time. There was only one thing to do. I gave the order to retire.

God knows how I got back! I remember stumbling alone in the darkness, guiding myself by keeping the din of the bombardment immediately in my rear. I fell continuously into old trenches and shell-holes. And then I came to barbed wire—our wire, I could tell by feeling the barbs, for the barbs on our wire were shorter than those on the Germans'.

I could not get through the entanglement without help, but I knew that the troops in the line would be on the alert for our return, and that it was safe to call to them.

I shouted. "Manchesters! I'm the O.C. of the raiding party—wounded. Will you help me through the wire?"

"Give the password," someone called.

I gave it. A little later I heard someone coming through the wire.

"Here I am," I called to guide him.

So I was taken into the trench. Stretcher-bearers gave me first aid at once. I found I was badly wounded in the right arm. I could walk, however, and so with a guide I started back along the communication trench. On the way we met an officer who took us into a dug-out. To my great joy I found that though I still could not see properly I could distinguish light from darkness.

They gave me whiskey in the dugout, and at length I restarted the journey back. We had just emerged from the trench on to the road at Givenchy when I heard the C.O.'s unmistakable voice.

"So there you are!" he bawled at me. "You've ruined the bloody raid, you——!"

I had to stand ten minutes of abuse. I made no explanation because he asked for none. My arm was in a sling, but he ignored that, and I did not mention that I could not see. No doubt I was foolish, but in view of his having condemned me, unheard, for what was certainly not my fault I did not feel disposed to make any sort of explanation.

I was taken into the dressing station. Crawshaw, our M.O., was like a mother to me. I could not talk, and I said nothing. Indeed I felt inwardly frozen. And the reason was that I was beginning to see, and what I saw



first was a body lying on the wire-netting bunk. I knew without being told whose it was. It was Hargreaves's. And, as I realised, he had been killed by the bomb which I had kicked off my foot and which had wounded me. He had kept his unsolicited promise and stayed by me, and as a result he was killed—the only one of the party, I learnt later, who had lost his life.

## CHAPTER VII

THAT WAS THE end of my service in France. I was taken by easy stages to Boulogne where, at Wimereux, I was operated on. But the doctors neglected to take a piece of shrapnel from my hand, and this remains there, even now, a source of much rheumatic trouble.

My condition was complicated by trench fever which now had me in its grip. But I could see again, though for years afterwards my left eye was very weak and afflicted with a nervous twitching.

Later I was taken to England. The hospital train arrived at midnight at Victoria. But I was in such pain that there was no joy in my return. A motor ambulance conveyed me to the 3rd London General Hospital, at Wandsworth.

I made a quick recovery. At first I feared that I should have a "dropped wrist" but electrical treatment brought life back into the hand. Within a few weeks I was allowed out.

This was in the early summer of 1917. By this time the people at home were not only on short commons but had lost all their enthusiasm for the war. I was amazed at their attitude. Despite the fact that a million or so of the race were enduring incredible hardships and dangers in France and elsewhere, those who were "keeping the home fires burning" seemed to be indifferent to what was happening at the various fronts. They wanted peace. No longer was a soldier popular. Even when I went to my own home the talk all the time was of what people in England were suffering on account of occasional air-raids and food shortage. Once,

when a companion on crutches and I, heavily bandaged and limping, travelled by 'bus from Knightsbridge to Wandsworth, we had to stand all the way; no one, man or woman, even offered us, much less insisted on our taking, seats.

Most of the men I had known had been killed by this time. London was a dreary place. True, there was plenty of gaiety in the West End, but it was of a riotous, unhealthy kind, kept going by young women who batted on returned officers and who were utterly heartless and callous. It surprises me that our novelists so far have not attempted to picture the blatant lust for excitement of the girls who, a year or two previously, had amused themselves by thrusting white feathers on "Cuthberts." Every officer was fair game to these newly-emancipated harpies. No doubt their attitude to life at that time was the result of fear; nevertheless it was not calculated to inspire the returned soldier with any reverence for womanhood.

Nor was that all. Married women, their husbands absent on the country's business, joined in the fun. Many a young officer at that period of the war was seduced by a woman of that type. Fortunately most men were abroad then; only a few came back to be disillusioned as I was.

It was a common saying amongst officers in 1917 that "There aren't any professional whores left in London; there are too many enthusiastic amateurs."

One night when I went to a West End resort a young colonel, whom I knew, joined me at my table.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked, nodding his head in the direction of a particularly riotous party.

"I suppose I'm a prig," I answered, "but it seems horrible to me. The fact that there's a war on makes it worse."

He nodded grimly. "These young women are glad there's a war," he said. "It gives 'em their chance. They excuse themselves on the ground that they're giving the 'boys' a good time, but they don't care a damn about the 'boys' except what they can get from them. They're not worth fighting for, by God!"

"Not all women are like them," I protested.

"All who can be are," he said cynically. "Half the men in my battalion seem to be fathering other men's brats. You can't be certain of any woman nowadays," he finished with such bitterness that I looked a question at him.

"My wife's bolted with a padre," he said. "My best pal's in the same boat. You married?"

I shook my head.

"Thank your lucky stars for that!" he congratulated me. "It's a wise man nowadays who's sure of his own wife."

I was silent. What could I have said?

"And I'll tell you this," he suddenly burst out. "If there were a referendum and the people were asked, 'Shall we end the war even if our men don't come back?' d'you know what the result would be? The people at home are fed up. They don't care a——about the men at the front; they've got beyond it. They're more conscious of short rations and restrictions and the fear of air-raids than of what the 'boys' are going through. They'd plump for ending the war at all costs."

He was bitter because of his personal loss, yet what he said was, I was to learn, commonly believed by the more serious officers who came home in those days from the front.

He finished up with a surprising remark.

"But wait till the war's over," he snarled in the intensity of his cynicism. "They'll think of the dead

then, the bloody hypocrites. They'll talk about their lost husbands and sons and sweethearts and brothers and conveniently forget the men they've amused themselves with meanwhile. If I'm alive when this show's over I won't come back here, not at any price. But I shan't be alive, thank God! Nor will you, perhaps. And you'll be lucky, my lad, for the women'll be on top."

"Numerically, perhaps," I agreed, "but——"

"In every way," he declared. "D'you think they'll give back the jobs they've taken? Not bloody likely! There's going to be a new world. Even if half a million of our chaps are killed, there won't be jobs enough to go round for men and women too, and women'll be given preference because they're cheaper."

I was not sorry to leave London. In August when I joined my reserve battalion at Whitby—they were part of the Yorkshire Coast Defence scheme—I felt I was going to healthier surroundings.

Yet Whitby, tiny place though it was, was a miniature counterpart of London. Girls haunted our camp just outside the town; they hung about the hotels and frequented all the public places, every one of them hunting for prey. Like the London women, of course, they were "only giving the 'boys' a good time."

In September I was examined by a medical board and pronounced fit. Meanwhile, however, I had been put in charge of the training of about a hundred men who had been transferred from the Tank Corps to the infantry because they were alleged to be over the height required for the former, and as a consequence my return to France was delayed.

I thoroughly enjoyed that phase of my army life. Given a free hand, I used to march the men out every morning and spend the whole day with them on the

moors. The training was intensive, for they had to be ready for France in a short time. It was continued when the battalion was shifted to Scarborough for the winter.

At length orders came for them to leave for France. By this time, living so much with them as I had been, I had become so attached to them that I tried to arrange matters so that I could accompany them. But I was told that as soon as they reached France they would be split up into different detachments, so that I should gain nothing by going with them.

Just before they left they were inspected at work. I had taught them a system of putting out barbed wire entanglement which I had invented myself, and so adept at it had they become that they beat the record for erecting wire, and my system was, I believe, recommended to the authorities for general use.

Then, two days later, preceded by the battalion band, I marched my "Tank Boys," as they were called, to the railway station. The General and the Colonel were there to see them off. When the men boarded the train I felt more unhappy than I had ever done before, for I loved each of them as a brother. The whistle blew. I could not see the faces at the windows because of the tears in my eyes. I never heard of any of those grand fellows again.

And now I have to explain the next development in my life by saying that I had fallen in love with a married woman.

I will not enlarge on that, for I conceive that it is quite wrong to go into details where such essentially personal matters are concerned, especially when they affect other people. I know that it is the fashion to write lurid descriptions in such circumstances and even to glory in the position. But I was far from being happy, and I certainly did not feel a hero.

The woman's husband was a friend of mine. Maybe I should have acted differently otherwise. Anyhow, at that time applications to transfer to permanent commissions in the Indian Army (there had been very heavy casualties in Mesopotamia and Palestine) were invited, and I responded.

It used to be the conventional thing in such circumstances as I then found myself in to go big-game hunting. The conventional thing is very often the wisest thing. Transferring to the Indian Army was a useful expedient. Besides, I argued, I liked army life and wanted to remain a soldier; certainly I was loth to return to journalism after the war, for it seemed now to be humdrum.

Several weeks later I was summoned before the General for an interview. He was a delightful old man who seemed to be unaware of what I had come for. He was chiefly interested in painting, and instead of discussing the purpose of my visit, we talked of art and artists. I stayed to tea with him, and still we talked of art and artists. At length I said I really ought to be going because I was on duty that night.

"A pity," he said. "Anyhow, I'm glad you came, my boy. You've given an old man a very pleasant afternoon. Can you come again to-morrow?"

I didn't think I could. I should be orderly officer.

"The next day perhaps?" he suggested. "Anyhow, come when you can. Good-bye, my boy."

"But, Sir," I protested. "My papers!"

"Papers, my boy?"

"Indian Army papers," I explained. "You have to see them, Sir."

"Have I? Bless my soul! I didn't know. Where are they? Where do I have to sign?"

I gave him the papers and showed him where he

had to put his name. He signed without reading, and I left him well content.

In the new year—that is, in early 1918—I went home on final leave before going East. This was the last I was to see of England till 1920.

In early February I received orders to embark at Southampton a few days later. I was warned to take as little kit as possible, so I had only my valise. At Southampton I boarded a Channel boat. Not till we were at sea did I know we were bound for Cherbourg. Throughout that stormy night the ship zigzagged—because of submarines—to the French port and in the early morning we docked. Afterwards the frozen passengers—mostly officers going, as I was, to join the Indian Army—marched to a rest-camp, where we stayed a couple of days. In my tent was a Canadian, a cavalryman and another officer who was so very insignificant that I cannot remember anything about him. Having learnt that we were to proceed by train to Taranto, in southern Italy, and that there would be four officers to a compartment, we resolved to keep together.

I had already learnt something of French trains in wartime, and so I was apprehensive about that journey which, I knew, would take at least a week. Fortunately, however, the first class compartment which we four officers took possession of was about equal in comfort to a modern third class compartment on an English railway, and it boasted a lavatory. Warned that we should have to feed ourselves *en route* we took aboard a stock of tinned food—mostly *paté de fois gras*, I remember!—and a methyated spirit stove.

So far as I can recall our first stop was Lyons, which we reached two or three days later. We were fairly comfortable—at least, in comparison with previous



experiences of "sleeping rough"—in the compartment. One person slept on the floor, one on one seat and two on the other. We took turns, of course, so that we all benefited and suffered alike.

At Lyons we detrained and went to a rest-camp for six hours. Wanting to stretch our legs my companions and I tramped along the beautiful river's edge till we came to a village some five miles away, and there at a farmhouse we gorged ourselves on omelettes. Then we returned and boarded our train, and the next stage of the long journey began.

But already we were more than bored. The Canadian suggested that we play poker, and assured me that I should soon learn the game. Maybe I did; nevertheless I had lost £20 by the time we arrived at our destination—and previous to that I had never either lost or gained so much as twenty pence at cards!

I forget the names of all the places at which we stopped, sometimes for a few hours, once for a whole night, but at all events we reached Marseilles in due course, and then we learnt that the Mont Ceni tunnel had just been blown up with a troop train in it, and that was the reason we were going the long way round to Italy.

Although the month was February the weather was now uncomfortably warm, but our kit was "in the van," so we could not change our clothes. At every station we stopped at—and we halted for at least a few minutes at most of them—we bought freshly picked oranges and lemons and so varied our diet somewhat. We spent several hours at Nice—and incidentally went by *fiacre* to Monte Carlo, which was deserted and dreary in the bright sunshine—and then, a short while later, the train crossed the frontier into Italy. After a night at a rest-camp at Ventimiglia—a place I remember well because

literally hundreds of Italian women offered themselves to us (using the now-very-familiar term "jig-a-jig") in return for tins of bully beef—we went on to Genoa and thence across to the Adriatic coast.

We were now so utterly weary of this long and slow journey in such cramped conditions that the scenery had quite ceased to hold any attraction for us. And we hated the whines of the Italians at every station we stopped at. How very different they were from the French! Yet I cannot suppose that there was any real food shortage and consequent distress in that country.

I have forgotten at which of the Adriatic towns we spent one night. At all events, on the ninth or tenth day after we had left Cherbourg we reached our destination, Taranto. Thence lighters conveyed us to the waiting troopship—one of the Khedivial line. We were bound for Alexandria, and we were to be escorted by a Japanese sloop.

I lost my companions then and instead of them had a Malayan official turned officer and known for some reason as "the Baron" and a subaltern straight from Sandhurst as cabin-mates. The voyage was begun in good spirits.

Either there was a *hoodoo* on that ship, or there was dark work underground. On the first night out, in the most submarine-infested part of the Mediterranean, the engines failed, and under a full moon we soldiers stood at boat-stations expecting every moment that, exposed and stationary as the ship was, we should be the victims of an enemy torpedo. For some extraordinary reason—"extraordinary" is the right word, for dozens of ships had been sunk in much less favourable circumstances hereabouts—we were untouched, and towards morning the engines restarted.

Two nights later, just as we were going to bed, there was a terrific impact. I was thrown to the floor, and "the Baron" fell on top of me.

"That's torn it," he commented. "We've been hit. Now for a spot of Kingdom Come!"

We seized our lifebelts and joined the press of people making for the deck.

"Boat-stations!" was being yelled from the bridge.

My "boat" was a raft of laths and oil drums. I took up position. Then I saw that the sloop was right across our bows. What had happened was obvious. We had rammed it amidships. But how could it have happened? True, the sloop had been circling us continuously, but on such a moonlit sea such an accident seemed impossible.

The military passengers had fallen in and were quiet, awaiting further orders. Evidently the ship was stuck fast in the sloop, and we supposed that if she attempted to break away she would sink. To make matters worse we were near the Greek Archipelago, which was another spot infested by submarines.

Then there was a sudden commotion. A crowd of Greek seamen were clambering into the lifeboats.

"Stop 'em!" yelled "the Baron"; and "stop 'em" we did. For five minutes there was pandemonium. I am afraid the dagoes were badly knocked about.

Again we stood in silence. At last the captain appeared on the bridge. The engine-room bell sounded. We felt the throb of propellers. In the moonlight the sea showed foam. Suddenly there was a violent lurch, and the ship parted company from the sloop.

Anxious minutes followed. An hour passed. Eventually the captain spoke through a megaphone from the bridge.

"When I give the word," he said, "you can dismiss

stations. We're badly holed, but it's just above the water-line, so there's no danger if the weather holds. But we shall have to proceed dead slow. We're going to make for Crete."

In silence we trooped below. I undressed and went to bed.

I suppose I was not asleep more than an hour before I heard running feet on the deck above. The ship was lurching and rolling. Evidently a storm had sprung up.

"The Baron" and the subaltern were still asleep. I did not like the sound of the running feet, so I thought I would go and investigate. Time enough to waken my companions when I knew what was happening. I went outside, and steadying myself by the hand-rail I went up the companionway. So rough was the sea that I had difficulty in keeping my feet. Rain was falling. A bitterly cold wind buffeted the ship. There was no one about.

I supposed that the running feet had been those of dago seamen changing watch.

Obviously the rough sea was increasing our danger, but obviously, too, there was no point in remaining on deck. On such a night one's bed was alluring. Also, not being yet much of a sailor, I was feeling queasy. I went below, and on the way back I entered the lavatory and as a precautionary measure put my fingers down my throat and made myself sick—the best remedy of all for seasickness. Then I went back to bed.

But not for long. Towards dawn we were called to boat-stations again. I am glad we were, for when the light came I saw the Greek islands as St. Paul must have seen them when, in similar difficulties, he had sailed this dangerous sea.

The rain had stopped. A patch of white mist scudded before the wind. When it had passed a rocky isle was

revealed. Slowly the crippled ship limped past it. Another isle sprang out of the mist, but the waves were so high we could see only the cliff tops. And so we floundered, as it were, into the morning of another age.

But how rough the sea was! Most of the passengers were sick, and I, despite my precautionary measure, felt extremely uncomfortable.

We could hear the pumps at work below—and no wonder, for heavy seas pounded our damaged bows. We were wet through from flying spray.

But presently the mist cleared altogether. A weak sun shone from a watery sky. The wind did not abate, but the weather looked promising.

How near we were to disaster we did not know till afterwards, but many of us must have guessed that we were shipping much water through that gaping hole in the bows. The captain was on the bridge, and he was obviously anxious. At eleven o'clock we were still at boat-stations, having stood without food since before dawn.

It is needless, I expect, to say that discipline was perfect. We sang and swapped yarns and grumbled, and grumbled and sang and swapped yarns. And then—well, then, the sea seemed suddenly to be rougher and the ship had so little way on her that she could scarce keep on her course. Ahead, out of the sea, an island loomed up. "Crete," said "the Baron" to me confidently, "and only just in time, I think," he added grimly.

That was obvious. It would not be long before the ship would founder, and there was not another craft in sight. We wondered what had happened to the sloop with the great gash in her side.

The ship was labouring badly. She had a pronounced list, and every time a sea hit her she lurched and

wallowed sickeningly. And Crete looked such a long way ahead.

It must have been about noon, I suppose, when I became aware that the ship no longer lifted at all to the waves but bored into them as though she would dive. I supposed that the end had come. An officer alongside of me began to curse.

"I spent two years in France," he said, "and didn't get a scratch; and now this!"

The lifeboats had long since been swung out. I was thankful that I had been detailed to a raft, for it seemed to me it had a better chance of survival in that sea than a boat. But the raft had to be clung to, not boarded—it would not bear much weight. That meant immersion; and already I was bitterly cold.

We waited for the order to act, but none came. We were nearer to Crete than we knew. As we drew under the lee of the island we went into calmer water. The gallant old boat still wallowed horribly, but there seemed to be a chance yet.

The engine-room bell sounded. Speed was increased. "He's taking a chance," said "the Baron."

When we felt the increased throb of the propellers we became excited and cheered the old boat on. "The Baron" sang an impromptu song in her honour. Plunging and rolling drunkenly, and staggering under the weight of water, the troopship drew ever nearer to the green isle that was enlarging before us.

"That's Suda Bay," "the Baron" told me, pointing to a cleft in the rocky shore.

Well, at last we reached safety and anchored close to the land. Then we had a belated breakfast while the pumps battled with the water in the hold.

Suda Bay was a seaplane station, though a small one. The people on the island were, we were warned,

hostile to the British, and this a small party of us proved when we went inland.

We stayed on the island several days. Then another Khedivial Line ship came and took us off and bore us to Alexandria.

This was my first visit to Egypt, and I remember but little about it. We stayed a week at a rest-camp at Sidi Bishr, east of Alexandria, and then entrained for Suez where we embarked on the *Royal George*, which, I believe, was a Canadian Pacific liner and was now a troopship.

The voyage to Bombay was uneventful. All I can remember of it is the sumptuous food offered to us at every meal—for there was no shortage in this part of the world—and the fact that at poker I won back the £20 which I had lost between Cherbourg and Taranto.

When we reached Bombay I was ill. The ship's doctor could not diagnose what the trouble was, but I had a very high temperature and as sore a throat as ever afflicted any man.

Yet had it not been for this strange and unidentified illness I might never have met Ananda a little later on, and had I not met Ananda I might have had a very different story to tell thereafter.

## CHAPTER VIII

I THOUGHT HE was an ordinary fortune-teller.

The strange illness I had contracted at sea had resulted in my being taken to Colaba Hospital as soon as we docked at Bombay. The doctor there, like the ship's doctor, failed to identify the trouble—perhaps it was a recurrence of the earlier trench fever. Anyhow, it did not last long, and in a week I was convalescent. As I lay one day in a roorki chair on the hospital verandah I became aware that a venerable Indian was standing beside me.

I never learnt how he gained admittance to the hospital. Possibly he had been allowed in as an entertainer to convalescents like myself.

He salaamed deeply.

"The sahib permits?" he asked in excellent English—which was as well, for I had no Hindustani then, of course, at all.

A little startled I asked him what he wanted.

He was studying my face—the face of a young man of 22.

"Will the sahib permit me to tell him something of his future?" he asked.

New to India as I was I did not know what to make of the situation. I supposed he was a fortune-teller, and I was not impressed by his offer, for I was not superstitious, and I did not believe that forecasting the future was possible. But I was bored, and I had no book.

"If you like," I answered.

He squatted on his haunches. "The sahib is new to India," he began—an inauspicious start, for there were



several reasons why he might have guessed that. For one thing, I had not yet acquired an Indian complexion; for another, I had not attempted to answer his questions in Hindustani—an Englishman in India never uses English to an Indian if he has at least a smattering of Hindustani.

"He will not stay long in India on this occasion," the fortune-teller went on. "Only a month or two."

I smiled my unbelief. True, the war was still in progress, and Indian troops were in Palestine and Mesopotamia; but I knew the rule that a newly-joined officer had to stay with his regiment at least a year (in order to learn the language) before going "on service."

"At least a year," I answered, and explained why.

"Only a month or so," the Indian insisted. "The sahib will go over the sea again—this time to Egypt and Palestine. But he will see no more fighting."

No more fighting! But how did he know I had seen any service so far? He might have imagined, if he knew anything of such things, that I had newly come from Sandhurst.

I frowned, I suppose, for he smiled slightly and said, dropping familiarly into the second person, "You see?"

"Go on," I said, a little impressed.

"And after the war you will become a staff officer," he went on.

"I think not," I answered. "I haven't any ambition that way. I want to remain a regimental officer."

Again he smiled.

"But you will not be a staff officer long because you will leave the Army," he went on.

"Not if I know it!" I said. "I'm a Regular."

"I know," he remarked simply. "Nevertheless you will leave, and you will have much money—not very much, actually, but it will seem a great deal to you."

"My dear man," I said, "I haven't a relative or a friend in the world who would leave me a single shilling, let alone much money."

"There are other ways of obtaining money," he observed.

"Not in the Army," I laughed.

"Not in the Army," he agreed; "but you won't be in the Army. The money will be some sort of reward or recompense."

He stopped.

"Is that all?" I asked, disappointed, for it was pleasant to learn that I was to achieve wealth, and I would have liked to hear more.

"For the present," the Indian answered. Then: "Sahib, do not laugh. What I have said means nothing to you—or to me, for that matter. Yet I have a purpose."

I could not help being struck by his manner. Also his appearance belied the idea that he was a charlatan: indeed, despite what he had said, and his apparent object in telling my "fortune"—for I did not doubt that he was now going to ask for money—he impressed me more than I would have cared to admit.

"You do not believe what I have said," he went on. "Yet——"

"You're an old rascal!" I said, forcing a laugh. "Get along with you! How much do you want?"

I expected that he would stand up and name his price; but he did neither.

"There is no hurry, sahib," he answered; "and I am no fortune-teller. I do not need money."

Now this was a strange matter. I was worried about it. I was becoming aware of mystery; and I disliked mystery. The verandah on which I lay was close to the sea and should have been comparatively cool, but I

was hot. The screaming of the kites as they wheeled and swooped in the courtyard beyond the railing whetted my nerves to an edge. My eyes ached because of the hard Indian sunlight on the wall opposite me.

"It is easy to prove what I have said is true," the Indian's voice came to me. "Your name is Francis, is it not?"

I felt easier now. "Wrong," I said.

He frowned.

"Certainly my second name is Frank," I said, feeling a little sorry for him, "but that isn't Francis, and I am never called by that name."

"Perhaps I am thinking of the future," the Indian said. "After all, 'Frank' is the diminutive of 'Francis'."

Now although I knew nothing of Indians so far, this way of speaking amazed me. For I still believed that the man was a fortune-teller—an unlettered man who could not have learnt English so thoroughly that he could use such expressions. And certainly as an Indian he ought not to have known the connection between "Frank" and "Francis".

"I could tell your past as well as your future," the man said. "Does the sahib permit?"

"It doesn't matter to me whether you've forecast correctly or not," I answered testily. "You haven't told me much, anyway."

But it did matter; I knew that it mattered a very great deal. For here was I new-come to India and on the edge, as it were, of a very great mystery. If he didn't want money what was the man's object? Vaguely I was afraid—not of him, for he was harmless enough, but of the unknown. I have never liked anything that savoured of occultism.

"Does the sahib permit?" he repeated softly, "—for the past is yours. Indeed, you *are* the past, for you

embody what you have experienced. I may not enter it without your consent."

Silently I tried to comprehend him.

"I don't understand you," I said. "But if you can tell me of things in my past, of course I shall be impressed, for no one in India, so far as I'm aware, knows anything about me."

"And you haven't a servant yet who could have told me anything," the old man prompted me.

"No; I haven't a servant yet," I agreed, not at the moment wondering how he knew that. "If you can tell me anything of my past it'll be—well, I don't know how you'll do it."

"You have been recently in an accident at sea—perhaps a wreck."

This gave me a jolt. Then I reflected that quite possibly he had heard the news of the Mediterranean mishap from one of those who had travelled with me. I said nothing.

"You have been wounded—in France," he went on after a slight pause.

Predisposed to scepticism, I told myself that this was only a guess; many soldiers had been wounded in France.

"The wound was in the arm of the writing hand; and you have been a writer and will be again."

And now indeed I was startled. I looked at him in amazement. His eyes were closed.

"You came to India because of a woman."

"Not directly because of a woman," I began in what must have been a scared whisper.

"You have been educated for religious purposes and——"

I listened aghast as a vivid picture of my stay at St. Benedict's Hostel came to my mind.

"You have been responsible for starting a disastrous fire. You——"

"Stop!" I commanded urgently.

"Is it enough?" he asked. "I entreat your pardon, sahib. I was not probing your past to satisfy myself. I will look no more."

He stood up.

"Who are you? Why have you told me all this?" I asked faintly.

He ignored the question. "In after years I shall see you again," he said softly. "Meanwhile have no fear. Remember what your Shakespeare wrote—'There is a destiny which shapes our ends'. So long as you submit to destiny—to the direction of the Lord Brahma—you will not go astray."

My heart was thudding. It is impossible to describe how I felt.

"I am going now," the Indian said. "We shall both be older when we meet again, and by that time Destiny will have led you——"

"Tell me more of the future," I begged him so urgently that I was almost out of my chair, despite my weakness.

"Forecasting the future is for fools," he answered. "I forecast a little of immediate events in your life only to impress you. How else could I have made contact with you but by pretending to be a mere fortune-teller?"

"But why have you come to me?" I demanded again.

"Only to make myself known to you," he answered, "so that you may be able to come to me later if need arises. . . . There is only one thing more," he went on. "The seed of the future lies in the past. It is good to reflect on one's past. It is enjoined on all Buddhist

devotees that every day they trace their past backwards—it is important to work backwards—and some have become so adept that their memories have been remarkably opened. They can not only go back into their earliest childhood but sometimes beyond birth.”

*Beyond birth!* To what? Yet I dared not ask the question.

On the table alongside was a tablet of notepaper and a pen—for I had been writing letters earlier. He bent down and wrote. Then tearing off the page he gave it to me. Mechanically I glanced down at it. It bore the single word, “*Ananda*”.

When I looked up he was gone.

I was sweating. Lying back in my chair I tried to collect my thoughts. Why had this strange man singled out me, a subaltern newly come from England, and spoken to me as he had done? That he had come to the hospital purposely to find me was obvious.

It was all utterly incredible. It was impossible to believe that I had not been dreaming. But the paper I held in my hand was proof that I was awake. I did not know what “*Ananda*” meant, but I supposed that it was a name—the name of the Indian who had “read” my past and forecast my immediate future.

Now I thought about it, he had not said very much about life, yet I had the extraordinary impression that he had told me more than I had ever learnt before.

Especially my mind concentrated on that idea of his that one could open the doors of memory if one practised retrospection. One could go back to one’s birth—and beyond.

I shivered and tried to banish the thought, but I could not. Instead, I wondered how far into my past I could think back. It was not very far, possibly because I did not work backwards as *Ananda* had instructed.

I have told part of this story of the "fortune-teller" before—in an article on the general subject which I contributed to the (London) *Evening News* (Oct. 4th, 1927), but I purposely refrained on that occasion from recording more than the fact that an unnamed Indian had forecast what subsequently came true.

The effect that this experience had on me was more profound than that of any other so far in my life. Consider the circumstances. I was more or less a conventional Englishman with the usual insular ideas, and though I was more than averagely "interested" in religion I had only the average indefinite and not-very-certain idea of the supernatural. I knew nothing of India beyond what I had learnt at school. To me at that time Indians were either Hindus or Mohammedans and therefore all heathens worshipping false gods. And no sooner had I entered India than a real miracle—something that was other than natural—had happened to me. An Indian for some hidden reason had sought me out—perhaps even had purposely singled me out—and solely with the idea of causing me to believe that he was later to influence me had forecast my immediate future, and to prove that he was a reliable prophet had told me things about my past that only I in all India had known.

If I say I was frightened I shall not be misunderstood. Anyone in exactly similar circumstances would have been.

Ananda's first forecast came true almost at once, as you shall see.

As soon as I was well I was ordered to join the 70th Burma Rifles at Secunderabad. I travelled alone almost overcome by the heat. At a junction named Manmad I had to change trains, and after an intolerable wait under the galvanised iron roof of that abominable

place I boarded a train of the narrow-gauge line that is elaborately named "The Nizam's Guaranteed State Railway." Whatever His Highness guaranteed it was not comfort! On that awful journey across the Deccan I tried in vain to get air. To put my head out of the window was to be scorched by the torrid wind and blinded by sand. I tried to smoke, but my tobacco was so dry that it burnt my mouth. I damped it under the lavatory tap, but because of the heat it would not remain moist.

How thankful I was when, just as darkness fell, I reached my destination! I had telegraphed the time of my arrival. An officer of the regiment met me and took me in a bullock-cart to the mess beyond Begumpet. The darkness scintillated with fireflies.

I was warmly welcomed at mess. The C.O., I learnt, was away, and would not be back for several days.

That night as I went to the bungalow, which, I learnt, was the Colonel's and in which I had been allotted a room, a white-clad figure salaamed on the threshold. Because he became such an important person in my next few years of life I must introduce him properly.

"I be master's bearer?" he asked in his soft Madrassi voice. "Me good bearer. Me bearer to——," and he rattled off a string of names which I did not recognise.

A servant was essential, and so far I had lacked one.

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Durasingham," he answered. "Sahib have me? Me got plenty chit to show sahib;" and he produced a bundle of letters from his white tunic.

I took them inside to the lamp which he had apparently lighted. They affirmed that he was everything a bearer should be.

His



"All right," I said; "I'll take you on. You'd better rig up my bed."

"I have done it already, sahib," said this most estimable servant.

And indeed he had not only rigged my camp bed, but had unpacked all my belongings.

The next two days I spent settling in. On the second my inside, probably owing to my not being used to the intense heat, became very troublesome, and I was afflicted with acute diarrhoea. Because I had been invited out to dinner that evening I sought a remedy, and one of the subalterns gave me a bottle of chlorodyne. I did not know what dose to take, and the label on the bottle supplied no aid, for it was printed in Hindi characters. I took a teaspoonful, thinking that that was the minimum amount likely to be effective.

Within a short while I had succumbed on my camp bed. Though the hour was about three in the afternoon I did not awaken till eight next morning! Chlorodyne is powerful stuff.

The Burma Rifles were a new regiment—the only contingent from Burma in the Indian Army. The C.O. Lieut.-Colonel Stuart, had been, I believe, seconded from the Indian Army to the Burma Police earlier, and had been chosen to command this regiment because of his knowledge of the language. Several of the other officers were similarly drawn from the Burma Police, whilst others came from the Burma Forest Service. Thus not all of them were regulars. The Adjutant and I were the only members of the mess who had seen any active service. Although I was still only a subaltern—though by now I had two stars—I was senior to two of the company commanders who held "acting" captaincies; hence this matter had to be adjusted, and I became an acting-Captain also.

Within a fortnight of my arrival I was sent to Mhow on a bombing course—although I had already had a superior bombing course in England. Mhow was (and probably still is) a dreary place. But unconsciously I enlivened it, for the officer with whom I shared a bungalow there facetiously addressed me as “Sir Charles” on one occasion because in mess I had told a funny story which was not of the sort related in drawing-rooms and which featured a fictitious “Sir Charles.” For some reason the nickname stuck. It was not surprising that some of the permanent residents of the cantonment should think that I really had such a title, and that “Charles” was my Christian name. I found myself extremely popular. Invitations were showered on me. I fortunately had to leave Mhow (for another reason!) shortly afterwards, so that I did not have to accept the invitations or explain matters.

Not a week after I arrived the Burma Rifles Adjutant wrote and told me that the regiment had been ordered to Egypt (that meant Palestine) and that under the rule governing newly-joined officers I would stay behind in charge of the depot. But I had no intention of being left behind in charge of the depot if I could help it. I wrote, therefore, to the Colonel begging to be allowed to accompany the regiment, pointing out that since I had already been on active service I should be useful. I was not at all sanguine about the result, but several days later I received a telegram bidding me return at once. I was to go to Egypt.

I travelled back that same night, and on the morrow I received a thorough cursing from the senior captain, who had been detailed to command the depot in my stead.

Not till we reached Bombay *en route* for Egypt did I remember Ananda's prophecy. It was a very thoughtful officer who embarked in the troopship a few hours

later. I should have been still more thoughtful could I have looked into the future and learnt that a few months afterwards several of the officers left behind with the depot were to go boating on the Hyderabad lake one day and that a storm was to spring up so that their frail craft was to be overturned with fatal consequences; for with my fondness for aquatic sports I should most certainly have been one of that party.

## CHAPTER IX

ON THAT VOYAGE back to Egypt I was Adjutant of the ship, for the regimental Adjutant was sick and could not officiate. Before we reached Aden one of the men underwent a Summary Court Martial for an offence which I cannot now recall. There was only one sentence which could be passed on him when he was found guilty—so many strokes with the cat-o'-nine-tails.

Very shortly after this sentence was carried out the scourging of Indian Army prisoners for certain offences was abolished, so the probability is that this case was the last of its kind and is therefore historic.

As Adjutant I had the unpleasant task of supervising the carrying out of the sentence. The unfortunate man, stripped to the waist, was tied to the rail of the poop. The regimental doctor—a Burman—stood by while he was scourged, all the Battalion being paraded to witness the occurrence—though I doubt whether they were much interested, for we had an epidemic of mumps on board and most of the men were afflicted! As the strokes descended on that bare back I felt physically sick and utterly ashamed. But I was only a cog in a machine, and I had no option but to carry out my duty and see that “justice” was served. I will say this, however, that were I in such circumstances now I would resign my commission or even be court-martialled myself rather than take any direct or indirect part in such an infamous punishment, having regard to the comparatively trivial nature of the crime. Scourge men, and even women, who are found guilty of grossly

illtreating children, or men of whatever age who try to rape women, by all means, but there is not the faintest justification for scourging a soldier for an offence of quite another kind.

I was to discover, however, that some Englishmen in India—and particularly those who had lived in Burma—thought that beating a “native” was not only the best kind of punishment in respect of all offences but was also a preventative. There was one officer in the Burma Rifles, for instance, who openly boasted to me that he thrashed his Burman servant (not a soldier) regularly to ensure his being kept in order. On one occasion I was (in Sinai) awakened from sleep by the sound of blows and yells from this officer’s tent.

We stopped several hours at Aden, and I went ashore, visiting the Arab tailor’s shop in a room of which were exhibited four beasts of the seal species (caught in those waters) described as mermen and mermaids. They were much bigger than human beings; otherwise the likeness was horribly uncanny. The faces were distinctly human, the fins were like arms and the female breasts were of the huge and pendulous kind that are seen otherwise only in women who have literally “run to seed.”

Afterwards I went in a rickety Ford car into the mountains as far as it was safe to travel. This was one of the war fronts, and Turkish and Indian troops were engaged in the solemn business of conquering and losing and reconquering a stretch of desert every other day. One day the Indian troops would sally forth and drive the Turks back a few miles, taking possession of the conquered territory; a couple of days later the Turks would attack and reconquer the disputed territory; and ever the endless battle raged back and forth.

And so at last we reached Egypt.

At Suez we disembarked and went in cattle-trucks to historic Tel-el-Kebir, on the Sweetwater Canal, there to engage in intensive training preparatory to being despatched to Palestine. Tel-el-Kebir was—and still is—a desolate spot. It consists of an Egyptian village in the desert. On the banks of the Sweetwater Canal—an artificial tributary of the Nile—was a thin fringe of cultivation, but that was all. If you were out in the desert and you looked towards the canal when a native felucca went past the craft seemed to be a mere sail skimming along the surface of the sand.

We stayed several months at Tel-el-Kebir. I was put in charge of much of the training, and taught the regiment how to throw bombs. In this I had a narrow escape from death. My sun helmet was holed clean through by a splinter of bomb which had been ill-thrown by one of the men from the derelict trenches of 1881 which we used for practice.

That helmet was rather a notorious one, by the way, for in the vent at the top a queer-looking spider had taken refuge, and despite the fact that he could not have found any food in his retreat, he stayed there from April till September of that year and was well-known throughout eastern Egypt and, later, southern Palestine. Not even the new vents caused by the bomb splinter prompted Herbert—as the mess named him—to desert. So famous did he become that even a General who visited us from Cairo for the purpose of inspecting us demanded to see him!

At length orders came for us to entrain for Palestine. Somewhat wryly I thought of Ananda's prophecy that I should not find myself fighting again in this war. But Fate had not yet divulged all her plan.

We spent a couple of days at Kantara, on the Sinai side of the Suez Canal. We were to parade at four

p.m. on the second day for entrainment. Shortly before the hour I went down the avenue of tents. Suddenly there was an explosion to my right, and a bullet whined past my ear. I was inside the tent from which it had come at once. Against the side lolled the body of a Burman sepoy, his head, from which blood streamed, a bloated and hideous mass. His brains stained the canvas wall. Between his bare legs was a rifle.

He died in my arms. Meanwhile other men had entered. The M.O. was summoned.

There could be no doubt what had happened. The man had committed suicide, pointing the gun to his head and pulling the trigger with his toe. Suicide! An ugly word in the circumstances. The officers whispered ominously among themselves. The man, we surmised, had been afraid of going into the line. But one officer said, "What can you expect? The men are Buddhists. Buddhists don't make soldiers. They're not supposed to take life."

"He's taken his own," I pointed out. "Besides the man wasn't a Buddhist. He was a Karen."

(There were about 200 men of the Karen tribe in the regiment, and all of them were Christians.)

"Christianised by the American Baptist Mission," the officer sneered, with some justification, as I was later to learn. "A morbid and unhealthy form of Christianity grafted on to the original Buddhism. These damned Karens are only half men."

Our entrainment was delayed, but eventually we were all in the open trucks and ready to proceed. I learnt that we were bound for Dehr-el-Belah, but that conveyed nothing to me, for I did not know where it was.

The railway—laid by our engineers behind the troops as the line was advanced into Palestine—was not so

faultlessly constructed that travelling on it was a pleasure. In our open trucks it was distinctly the reverse. Soon, too, we were busy putting out miniature fires in our clothing, for sparks from the engine smothered us.

Darkness fell, and the great stars shone. There was no moon. Someone produced a bottle of whiskey, and we drank a tepid mixture from enamel mugs.

The air grew cold, as it always does at night in the desert. I huddled under the side of the truck and tried to doze. Failing, I filled my pipe and lighted it, but this was unsatisfying. It is a curious fact that unless you can see the smoke from a pipe you gain no pleasure from it; indeed, you do not even know whether it is alight.

I was asleep when the lumbering train stopped. The night was intensely dark. The chattering of the men sounded feeble in the desert's deep silence. We detrained and stood on the sand awaiting orders.

At last they came. We were to sleep where we stood till daybreak. My servant Durasingham (we had been allowed to bring our civilian servants with us) appeared as though by magic. He had my valise on his shoulder. How he found me I do not know, for the night was as black as pitch, and we had no lights other than the officers' electric torches. But such obstacles were no obstacles to Durasingham. He unwound the valise, shoved all the contents, except a couple of blankets, into one end to act as a pillow, and bade me seek repose.

In those days I could fall asleep at any time and place (except in an open truck on the railway!), and I was not even aware of Durasingham's wrapping the two blankets round me.



That was at about three o'clock in the morning. At daybreak he awakened me and proffered a mug of tea, steaming hot. How he had made it and whence he had found wood for his fire I did not know. One did not ask Durasingham questions; one simply accepted all his service in grateful and admiring silence.

I saw that not far away were tents. Beyond them I could see the welcome green of palm trees. I thought I could smell the sea. And then I had a surprise, for from the distant tents figures emerged. Used as I was to the small stature of our Burman sepoys they seemed to be huge. They came towards us. They *were* huge. And they had black faces. Then I saw that they were negroes.

I did not know there was a negro battalion in the British forces, but soon I learnt that this was a battalion of the British West Indies Regiment—known to the Turks as the "Black Watch"! They were officered by white men, most of them ex-planters, etc.

They gave us breakfast. The B.W.I. officers, I could see, were "tough." Indeed, it was a "tough" regiment altogether. The officers' method of imposing discipline would not, I think, find approval in the British Army. In the cemetery nearby, I was told, lay the bodies of an officer and a man. The former had been murdered by the man—a razor being the weapon used—as retaliation for some condign punishment. But perhaps this tale was fiction designed to impress us. Certainly those hefty-looking officers bragged of their exploits plentifully. Their chief boast was of one of their number who was perpetually drunk and whose pet diversion was trying to break men's backs over tables. But this again was possibly a mere fairy story built round a character who was not all that he should have been.

I learnt, too, that we were many miles behind the

front line, and that the B.W.I.'s had been guarding prisoners of war and lines of communication, and I naturally wondered why those stalwart warriors were not in the firing line. I heard rumours afterwards, but I do not know what truth there was in them, and so they are not worth repetition.

The next day the B.W.I.'s marched out. We took over their job of guarding prisoners-of-war—confined in huge barbed-wire encampments—and hospitals. The front line was far away, for by now Allenby had got beyond Jerusalem.

Why had we, a fresh battalion, been detailed for duty on Lines of Communication? Reason told me that the suicide at Kantara could not have been responsible, for even had this been ascribed to fear, it was no criterion where the rest of the men were concerned. Also it was entirely unlikely that orders had been changed at the last moment—while, in fact, we were *en route* for Palestine. I supposed that the General who had inspected us some time previously had either not been favourably impressed by the military bearing of the men or had been dubious whether Buddhists would make good fighters. I imagined that the latter supposition was right. And I was depressed as a consequence. I had not applied to be posted to this regiment, and I felt resentful—so unreasonable was I—that I should have been sent to it.

Meanwhile, however, we settled down. One company was detached to Rafa, on the borders of Sinai and Palestine, a few miles to the south. Our second-in-command, Major Malet, went with it.

I was made mess-president-cum-mess-secretary but having no head for figures, and because I did not think it necessary to keep accounts—for, indeed, it never occurred to me, so naïve was I, that a mess secretary

need bother about such things!—I had to retire ignominiously. But I was very busy otherwise, for the C.O. decided that all the Burman officers—that is, the equivalent of Indian officers, who hold Viceroy's commissions—should go to school and learn tactics, etc., and that I should be their instructor. Because of the heat I used to start work at four a.m. when the "morning star" (whichever planet it might be) hung over the desert like a moon and shed a light of its own.

We were within a couple of miles of the coast. I went once to the shore with the C.O. to bathe and thereafter wandered there alone almost every afternoon because of the relief from interminable desert-sand—which I had not yet learnt to love—and also because of nostalgia: the sea linked me in thought with England's greenness.

One evening when I went and lay among the sand-dunes on the shore and gazed westward over the empty sea I of a sudden became aware that I was not alone. I looked round. A tall and gaunt soldier stood on a hummock and stared into the blue distance. That he was not conscious of my presence was obvious.

I must have moved, for he turned sideways and looked in my direction. Then he saluted and would have turned to go, but there was such a look of disappointment on his face that I stayed him. At first he was truculent; a fellow-feeling told me that he had come for the same reason that I was there, and that he resented being disturbed. But I put him at his ease, and presently he sat down alongside. I supposed that he was an R.A.M.C. man or a sapper, but I did not question him, and his helmet did not reveal his corps.

"It'll be lovely in England just now," I said rather woodenly after a long silence. "I wonder if they've had any late frosts this year."

It was a remark to kindle any countryman. His face lighted up.

"No doubt they have," he said, "for they always do have them. You bed out in the third week in May, but you're bound to lose some plants before June comes."

"When were you last home?" I asked him softly.

"I haven't been home at all since I came out at the end of '14," he answered. He was staring over the sea. "It's a long time."

And I had been East only a few months! I was ashamed. To cover my confusion I asked him where his home was.

"I'm a Worcester man," he said proudly.

"Right from the heart of England," I added.

"Right from the heart," he agreed in the same tone.

For a long time we stared over the sea; then:

"Tell me about your home," I said to him.

"My home, Sir?" he answered a little self-consciously.

"What can I tell you about it? It's just home. It's in a valley among the Worcester hills."

I avoided looking at him, for I wanted him to go on. I wanted him to picture a place—though not in Worcestershire—that troubled my own mind.

It is quite impossible for me to reproduce exactly what he said and still more to invest the picture with the atmosphere with which his love for his home filled it; but he told me of the green fields of his own place in the hollow in the hills where he was born; of the cool river and deep lanes and humpy hills; of the square tower of the church and the low-roofed inn on the green. Sunset came and a hot wind blew across the desert, but still he went on talking, and I did not stay him. He spoke foolishly of odd things—meadow-sweet, eggs and bacon, and mushrooms fresh-gathered

on a September morn, of church bells sounding across water-meadows, market days and fussy local trains, bread and cheese and ale, delphiniums and flower shows in high summer. . . .

And neither of us felt in the least self-conscious, for you see we two were alone in the growing darkness on a sand-dune in the desert, and we were both filled with longing for England.

"But the cities are already spreading into the countryside," he said.

I could not see his face now, for darkness was full come. I knew that I ought to be back in camp for mess, but I wanted rather to stay there on the sand-dune with this Worcestershire man.

He asked me suddenly: "Why are we fighting Germans and Turks?"

I said conventionally: "Because we were forced to. We didn't start the war. We're on the defensive."

"That's what we all think," he agreed, "but that isn't what the Germans think. It isn't strictly true either. We went to war because of our alliance with France, and because we were afraid that if the Germans got Belgium we——"

"Well, isn't that acting on the defensive?" I asked.

I could sense that he was looking at me there in the darkness.

"Be honest, Sir," he said in a low voice. "It isn't defence to strike before you're struck."

"But it may be good policy," I pointed out.

"But supposing it's only a traditional superstition that it's dangerous for us if Germany has Belgium," he persisted. "We're thinking in terms of two hundred years ago. It seems to me we're fighting an imaginary enemy. There's a much more real enemy at home."

"Meaning?"

"Industrialism. Taking men away from Nature to which they belong—for they're a part of Nature—and——What are we all working for?"

"I don't follow you," I said, though I think I did.

"Aren't we all working for food and clothing and lodging? Nature provides us with these things. Why should we work indirectly to get them? We gain our bread and butter—most of us—by making unnecessary things to sell to the rest of the world. They used to do without those things, but we create a demand for them by teaching they're an essential part of so-called civilisation, and the more we make the more we can make, and so the cities expand and over-run the countryside, and instead of growing our own food we buy it from the people who buy our goods. It would be ludicrous if it weren't so tragic."

I did not venture to answer him. Presently he continued: "If you take the people from the countryside and urbanise them you make them artificial and physically weak. And you destroy their souls. They're all busily competing with one another, and you have to hedge them round with rules and regulations to prevent them from exceeding the bounds of decent competition. Why should they compete at all when there's ample for everyone?"

"I'd rather fight industrialism than fight Germans and Turks," he finished.

"Yet you've been fighting Germans and Turks since the end of '14," I said, and at once wished I had held my tongue.

"We live and learn," he said simply. "I daresay you have ideas now you never thought of in 1914."

Which was true. For in 1914 I was a Socialist, as, according to Clemenceau, every young man with a heart

ought to be. And now I had grown into an Imperialist—or at least I persuaded myself that I had.

I was too young still to have any real appreciation of what this gaunt soldier said there on the sand-dunes in 1918. I was moved, certainly, but the reaction was sentimental and emotional rather than of the intelligence.

The moon rose behind us as we lay facing the sea. I said that I must be going.

"Have you ever heard of Stanley Baldwin?" my companion suddenly said.

I answered, "No."

"He's a Worcestershire man—a politician," said the soldier. "He's as fine a man as ever came out of the heart of England. One day he'll be a leader of the people. The people'll trust him; and if he's really true to himself and he's logical he'll try to smash industrialism. And if he does he'll be aiming a blow at his own family, for he's 'in steel.' But he'll have to do it if he's true to himself and to the country he loves."

"Is he——? What party is he?" I asked, for in those days the present Lord Baldwin was unknown to such people as I.

"He's a Conservative."

"Then he won't do as you think," I declared.

"But the Conservatives are the only party who could do it," the man argued. "The very centre of their creed is—or should be—agriculture rather than industry. But that's beside the point. I pin my faith in Stanley Baldwin. He's heading towards the light—I'm sure of it—and if he sees it and he's true to himself he'll have to——"

"But what about the Colonies?" I protested. "We can't be agricultural if we're to hold those."

"They're heading for independence," he affirmed. "In any case, the Colonies aren't a scrap of good to

England. They're expensive because we have to keep up a huge Navy to protect 'em. Also they make us unsafe. Other nations—as blind as ourselves—envy them. They're no good to us, Sir. I don't say they couldn't be of use to us, but the truth is we show we don't really want them because we don't attempt to use them properly. Canada and Australia, for instance, are as large as Europe, which supports hundreds of millions of people, yet neither of them has a population as big as London's."

"Surely you are wrong!" I exclaimed.

"It's a fact, Sir," he assured me—and later I verified this and found that he had not exaggerated. "Neither Australia nor Canada," he repeated solemnly, "although each is as big as Europe, has a population bigger than that of London. It's a farce to cling to whole continents which we can't use."

This was a surprising conversation between an officer and a Tommy on the Palestine coast, but in truth it did not affect me much at the time. And I did not see the man again, for within a week or two he was transferred elsewhere. Whether he still lives I have no means of knowing. If he does he will be disillusioned in his Worcestershire hero. Lord Baldwin was not sufficient of a reactionary to preach a return to the agricultural England of the past. Nor had he done so would he have achieved anything. For this country of ours is a democracy, and since the bulk of the population is engaged in business and industry, and has no desire to leave the imaginary delights of the fleshpots, a return to agriculture is impossible until stark economic facts necessitate it.

Writing now twenty years later I have not the slightest doubt that the whole world is heading for a collapse because the whole world is now industrialised.



The old-time industrial countries, led by Britain, are losing their overseas markets because the countries that used to be customers are themselves becoming industrial. The consequence is that industry is forced to look for customers in its own camps and to do that it has to create by means of advertisement (that is in the majority of cases morally indefensible) new needs, and also to produce articles so shoddily made that their life is *short* and consequently there is a continuous demand.

## CHAPTER X

SOMEWHERE ABOUT THE middle of 1918 Major Malet left for England on leave, and I was ordered to take over his command. I went down to Rafa by train therefore. As I made my way through the camp to the orderly-room—a reed hut—I suffered, by a curious coincidence, exactly the same experience as I had undergone at Kantara. A Karen Burman shot himself through the head, and as on the previous occasion I was the first person to enter his tent.

The occurrence was an exact replica of the earlier one. Indeed, so startlingly similar was it that for a moment, as I gazed down at the still-quivering body and saw the bloated head and the brains on the tent-wall I was filled with superstitious fear. It seemed that I was destined to relive that horrid experience: it was like a nightmare that repeats itself and makes one afraid to go to sleep.

But this was not the end of these fatalities. Not very long afterwards a third Karen killed himself in exactly the same way. Meanwhile a Court of Inquiry had established the cause of the second suicide. Apparently the man concerned had been reprimanded in a mild way earlier, and this had preyed on his mind. I learnt that it was the Karen's favourite custom to commit suicide in such circumstances, and that in Burma, if he conceived that he had a grievance against anyone, he would very often kill himself on that person's doorstep, as it were.

Poor Major Malet went off on leave in a very unhappy frame of mind, though it was not he

who had reprimanded the man who had committed suicide.

The third suicide occurred in early August, when an N.C.O. reprimanded a Karen, and the Karen brooded himself into a sufficiently morbid state of mind to make self-killing inevitable—inevitable in a Karen, that is. By this time I had got to know them well. They had been split up among the four companies, one platoon to each, for obvious reasons. They had beautiful faces, most of them, but they were unspeakably melancholy and were forever singing lugubrious hymns (which they had learnt from the American Baptist Mission in Burma) and accompanying themselves on native instruments. Occasionally they would insist on giving a concert of such music in front of the officers' mess after dinner at night, and to humour them we had to sit outside and applaud.

Rafa was a fairly big encampment containing many thousands of prisoners-of-war, a railway depot (for repairs) and a field hospital, besides a ration dump. There were many British personnel stationed there; consequently there was a chapel and a padre.

I had become very friendly with the padre—newly-ordained and newly out from England—and on the day after the third suicide he was to have lunched with me. I had promised him a "treat" of pigeon-pie. A great number of carrier pigeons had nested in the eaves of my reed hut and multiplied to such an extent that, in self-defence, I was forced to have many of them killed, and naturally the meat they provided was not wasted.

But on that particular day we had to bury the dead Karen, and since he was a Christian his obsequies necessitated the attendance of the padre. I therefore sent a note to my friend asking him to come to the

camp at noon instead of one o'clock—the hour appointed for lunch—and do what was necessary.

Meanwhile the Karen's body was sewn up in blankets and conveyed on a limbered wagon to the cemetery. The padre was at the graveside when we arrived. The body was placed at his feet.

I expect that this was the first funeral that he had conducted. And it must have been particularly gruesome for a person who was not accustomed, as I was, to seeing the dead bodies of men killed violently. True, the body in this case was not visible, but the blankets showed the huddled outline of it, and were horribly bloodstained. Anyhow, the padre's face was pale when he began the service, and his voice shook. The object at his feet compelled his unwilling attention, and he gazed at it with horrified eyes, the while he tried to carry on.

When I saw that his face was becoming green I took the initiative and told the men to lower the body into the grave without further delay.

"Cut it short, old chap," I whispered to the padre. "The good Lord will understand."

And "cut it short" he did. I was afraid he was going to vomit into the grave, for he was very near to it. He finished the abbreviated committal service in a soundless, dry-lipped whisper; and then he bolted, hand to mouth. Needless to say, I ate the pigeon-pie alone!

But do not think that was callous and insensitive. On the contrary; but I had become inured to death and dying and horrors, and I managed to bottle up my feelings—maybe to suffer the worse, as a consequence, in later years.

I had to work very hard in Rafa in terrific heat—and this was my first summer in the East. Moreover,

we were very short of water. What we had was borne to us on camels, and it was lukewarm and chlorinated. The irony of the situation was that through Rafa ran the water pipe-line which the engineers had constructed as the Expeditionary Force advanced, and we could not tap it. That is to say, a plentiful supply flowed through Rafa but was quite unavailable to us.

There is an interesting story in connection with this pipe line. When the Turks held Palestine they had a sort of ironical proverb to the effect that not until the water of the Nile flowed into Jerusalem would the land ever be wrested from them—a seemingly impossible phenomenon. But the water that flowed through the pipe line we had constructed came from the Nile, and by this time it had certainly reached Jerusalem. A mere coincidence, perhaps, yet Allenby did not think so. His strategy was all based on the strategy of Joshua, as recorded in the Old Testament—he made this plain to many of us who met him—and he was convinced that he was a modern crusader who had been destined by God to free the Holy Land from the Turkish yoke. He even went so far as to quote Scripture in support of this.

I became very much interested in this idea, and a queer book entitled *Light for the Last Days*, which someone sent me and in which the author, Dr. Grattan Guinness, claimed to have discovered exactly what span of time a “day” meant in the Book of Daniel, prompted me to investigate that extremely difficult prophecy for myself. To my amazement I found that, using Dr. Guinness’s definition of a “day” the recapture of Jerusalem was forecast for 1917. Small wonder that Allenby thought himself a God-guided deliverer.

While I was at Rafa I was informed by a credible witness that a mummy had been unearthed near

Jerusalem. During the process of unwinding the cloths which bound it the excavators concerned were astonished to find that the cloths were becoming more and more coloured. Finally they stopped in amazement, for the pattern which the bindings made at this stage on the mummy were those of a perfect Union Jack in red, white and blue.

I give this story for what it is worth. I neither believe it nor disbelieve it. I only say that my informant was a credible witness, who was most unlikely to have invented or embellished the tale.

I was not long in Rafa. Ever since I had arrived at the place I had been suffering from acute diarrhoea. The only remedy available seemed to be chlorodyne (of unhappy memory!) but this was useless. I became very thin and old-looking. Then one day as I was riding back from Beersheba, whither I had gone on some errand or other, I fainted and fell off my horse. I was taken back to Rafa and went to bed. Next morning I felt so utterly ill that I went down to the field hospital.

"Poor old chap," said the M.O. in charge. "You've got dysentery."

I was put to bed in the hospital. Fortunately I had a subaltern with the Burma Rifles' detachment who could carry on in my absence, so I did not worry about that. I knew he could get help from Belah, where the rest of the regiment was. My servant, Durasingham, came down to see "master" on two successive days. On the third day I was in a hospital train, very ill indeed, on my way to Egypt and worrying myself into a state of frenzy concerning him. For not being a soldier, he was in no one's charge but mine, and I wondered what would become of him. I had tried to arrange that he accompany me on the train, but this was forbidden.

What followed is really an epic of devotion, and I doubt whether it was paralleled in Palestine. First let me say, in order that the question of motive be properly understood, that I need not have worried about Durasingham (and this he knew), for in the ordinary course of events he would have been shipped back to India at Government expense. But he did not go back to India.

One day about a fortnight later as I lay dozing in a ward of Ras-el-tin Hospital at Alexandria, and very ill indeed, I awoke to find someone kneeling by my bed. I was too weak to do more than feebly raise a hand, and I could see only an Indian's *pagri* (turban). I touched it. It was raised. Durasingham's tear-stained face looked at me in wonderment.

"I thinking master was dead," he whispered in his quaint Madrassi English.

I could not talk; I was too weak. It was not till weeks later that I heard the full story. Apparently on the third day after I had gone to the field hospital at Rafa, Durasingham had paid his daily visit to me only to find me gone. All they knew at the hospital was that I was on a train bound for Egypt.

Durasingham had no money. He therefore packed his scanty belongings into a haversack, and with no more equipment than that, started to tramp across the desert of Sinai to Kantara. Perhaps I need not say that it was in this same desert that the Israelites were alleged to have wandered forty years before finding the Holy Land. The fact that Durasingham might, had he been ingenious, have "jumped" a ration train is beside the point. He was a very simple-minded young man in 1918—though he learnt "his way about" later—and he started his odyssey on foot.

He reached Kantara eventually and went to the Base Hospital. A ward orderly told him that I had

been sent to Alexandria. Durasingham crossed the Suez Canal and trekked to Port Said. There he did "jump" a train, but it took him to Cairo. He tramped out of Cairo alongside the railroad to a local station and there "jumped" another and in due course arrived at Alexandria.

Now Alexandria in 1918 was full of military hospitals, so his task was far from being ended yet. But in due course he found me—at the third hospital he visited.

No wonder he thought that I was dead. Certainly I was scarcely alive. For several days I remained in this stage, daily injected with emmetin—for it was the amoebic variety of dysentery that I had contracted—, but eventually I began to mend; and at last I was well enough to get up. But I had no control over my bowels, and if I went out it was in the sure knowledge that the excursion would end in catastrophe.

Finally I was sent to a convalescent home for officers at Ibrahimieh, a suburb of Alexandria, and after a fortnight was ordered to Kantara before returning to Rafa. But Kantara was in the grip of Spanish influenza, and before very long I was infected. Several days later I found myself back in the same hospital at Alexandria and was having daily injections of quinine—for the doctors were uncertain whether I had malaria or the virulent influenza—in my rump muscles. In my ward quite three-quarters of the officer patients died with foam from their lungs all over their faces.

Recovery was slow because I was already so weak from dysentery. At length, however, I was again convalescent. On November 11th, 1918, I went into Alexandria for the day. I could scarcely walk. I thought I would have a solitary lunch at the Majestic Hotel, and because I was so tired already I entered the place before noon.



I do not know what time it was when I heard the news of the Armistice, but I remember that I was sitting in the lounge and feeling very weak. My weight had gone down from ten stones to seven, and I was just a ghost of my former self. I heard a sudden groan. An officer was reading a notice pinned to the wall. He turned round. Tears were streaming down his cheeks.

"It's all over!" he croaked wildly. "O God! it's all over!"

I struggled to my feet. I thought he was ill and delirious. He slumped into a chair.

"It's all over," he repeated stupidly. "No more war. All over, I tell you!"

He was crying like a child.

My heart stopped beating. I understood what he meant. All over! The war was ended!

I don't think it is possible to describe what I felt. My mind for the time being was blank. There was no gladness in it, no relief; it was just numb. Maybe there were tears on my face too, but if there were I do not know what caused them.

The place was strangely silent, though I could hear a band playing in the dining-room not far away. I stared at the wall. I saw dead men lying grotesquely in No-Man's-Land, festoons of rusted barbed wire, shattered tree-stumps, desolation. The war was over; the troops had left the trenches; only the dead and the desolation of war remained.

This was Armistice, the beginning of the new world; the old, to which I belonged, was dead. I wondered whether I were dead; whether I had died that night in France when I had kicked a bomb from off my foot and it had exploded in the air; whether since then I had been a ghost. For I belonged—yes, surely I belonged—to the

company of those who had fought with me and had found rest in oblivion.

I looked at the officer in the chair opposite. He had a scar across his forehead. His face, tear-stained, was grey.

"Come on," he said grimly. "Let's go and have some lunch and celebrate."

We both rose together. He linked his arm in mine. We went slowly into the dining-room and sat down in silence. The band blared.

I do not know what we ate, though I remember that one course was caviare. We drank champagne. But we did not speak till the end. Then solemnly we drank Napoleon brandy—two glasses apiece.

We toasted each other with the first. With the second—well, I think we were both thinking of the past. Every friend of mine of the old days, with the single exception of Mark Symons, the painter, was dead.

## CHAPTER XI

IN THE BIG convalescent camp at Sidi Bishr—a suburb of Alexandria—I spent an anxious time, for I had a personal problem. The war was over. The *necessity* for being a soldier was ended. And I was very tired after three and a half years of hard training, active warfare with its severe toll on nerves and health, and serious illness. I did not want to go back to the 70th Burma Rifles, for however that regiment may have developed since, in those days it seemed to me to be a most unmilitary unit both as regards the officers and as regards the men. On the other hand, I was now a Regular officer and could make the Army my profession, and I had no desire to go back to the narrower world of my old profession.

But I had not much time to think. The troops, newly returned from Palestine, were proving too much of a handful for the military authorities. The Australians were particularly wild. Much looting of Alexandrian shops went on. A number of officers, including myself, were therefore impressed into service as Assistant Provost Marshals.

And when the excitement had died down there were endless funerals which convalescent officers had to attend—for Spanish influenza was now at its height, and men were dying like flies.

And there were interned civilian prisoners who had daily to be taken out for exercise. They were on parole; consequently no armed soldiers accompanied them. Instead, an officer was detailed to do so. The prisoners gave that officer—myself on a number of occasions—an anxious time.

I could not make up my mind about being demobilised. I realised that as a result of illness I was depressed in spirit and not capable of clear judgment, and so I resolved to shelve the problem for the time being. In any case, there was no necessity for an immediate decision.

But of one thing I was certain: I was not going back to the Burma Rifles. Even had I personally liked the regiment it was evident that the military authorities did not; otherwise it would not have been side-tracked in Palestine and prevented from going into the line.

Now while I had been in Kantara, after I was evacuated from hospital on the first occasion, I had met there Major Malet, who had returned from leave. He was doing all he could—or, at least, this was my impression—to avoid going back to the Burma Rifles. He said that his regiment was really the 38th Dogras and that he had been seconded to the Burman regiment only because of his knowledge of Burmese. He was going to rejoin the 38th if he could, and he advised me to transfer to that regiment. And when I saw a number of the Dogra men at the concentration camp there, awaiting evacuation to their unit up the line, and noted what fine, upstanding, military fellows they were, I made up my mind on the spot that I would do as Malet advised.

During my stay at the convalescent camp at Sidi Bishr, therefore, I went to headquarters and made a formal application. The result was that a few days after Christmas I entrained with Durasingham for Cairo, having received orders to join the 38th Dogras at Mena where, almost in the shadow of the Great Pyramid, they were encamped.

The 38th Dogras was—and no doubt still is—one of the “crack” infantry regiments of the Indian Army. How different was the atmosphere of its mess from that

of the 70th Burma Rifles! But so conservative were the officers—and rightly so—that it was a long time before I was accepted as one of them.

Already the 38th were training hard. They had not left Palestine—where they were in the front line—till December, but the end of the war had not meant a holiday for them. All day long we drilled and manœuvred in the desert, and the clean air and the healthy life soon restored me to something approaching normality—though I still suffered, and indeed still suffer now, from the evil effects of dysentery. Very often, of an evening, several of us subalterns would go on horse-back down to the tram terminus at Mena House Hotel and thence by tram to Cairo, where we would have dinner at one of the hotels or at the famous “Jimmy’s” (St. James’s Restaurant).

It was in the late winter following the Armistice that Egypt was visited with a phenomenal rainstorm. For three days the *Khamsin* wind blew hard from the south, blinding and choking us with sand; then on the third night rain began to fall. Rain is such a rare occurrence in Egypt—some places, such as Tel-el-Kebir, had at that time had no rain for many years—that even the beginning of the downpour was startling. But it persisted for three days. On the second evening several of us tried to get to Cairo, but the tram-track was flooded, and we had to turn back. The Cairo streets, we learnt, were knee-deep in water, and all the city was at a standstill.

During the subsequent two years I spent in Egypt people never ceased to talk of that flood.

The camp by this time was beginning to thin, for demobilisation was now in full swing, and many of the British troops were returning to England. Towards the end of that winter the 38th Dogras were ordered to

Belbeis, a place between Cairo and Zagazig on the Cairo-Port Said railway line and on the edge of the desert.

Here there were many thousands of Turkish prisoners-of-war in barbed wire enclosures, and two regiments were required to guard them. The encampment was actually on the desert, but the Sweetwater Canal, on which the village was built, was only a few miles away, and the cultivated fields which the canal irrigated extended for some distance out. The railway station was about three miles from the camp.

The officers' mess was a reed hut; but both officers and men were quartered in tents. The regiment we had relieved had done little or nothing to make the place habitable; it consisted merely of hut and tents on a bare desert facing the dreary enclosures filled with prisoners of war. But in a short while I began thoroughly to enjoy the life. I was already under the spell of the desert, and soon it was to fill my mind to such an extent that no sooner had I, at the end of 1920, left it for good than I ached to be back in it. . . . Of this more later on.

By a strange coincidence—if so it may be described—the other regiment in the place was soon relieved by the 70th Burma Rifles. I now had ample opportunity to compare my old unit and the new one, and as a result I was grateful for the conjunction of circumstances that had resulted in my joining the 38th Dogras.

Then one day came startling news. Egypt was in revolt against the British regime. There had been a massacre of "whites" in Upper Egypt and many cases of murder elsewhere, and troops were on the move.

It is perhaps rather horrible to say that we welcomed the thought of fighting—for we fully expected to be moved to the affected areas. The truth is that

after a year of activity we were finding our present life dull and stagnant.

The railway line between Cairo and Belbeis and between Belbeis and Zagazig was cut and the canal was blockaded. That meant that our ration supply was threatened. More than that, it was actually stopped. Our supplies diminished rapidly, and soon we were reduced to horseflesh. Also our supply of tobacco and cigarettes and matches ran out—a serious business indeed!—; besides which we were unable to renew our mess liquor.

We chafed considerably at the inaction. Learning, however, that a force of Young Egyptians were on the march from Cairo to Belbeis, with the idea of freeing the prisoners-of-war, we dug machine-gun pits (which we had to dig afresh every day, on account of the sand which drifted into them) and hoped that the news was true.

Instead General Bulfin and his staff came down from Cairo—I never learnt how they got through the blockade. His ostensible errand was to inspect us; I think, however, his real mission was to administer soothing syrup, for by this time, I have no doubt, headquarters had realised that we must be getting very restless because of inaction. Anyhow, he addressed us British officers, telling us that we were performing a very necessary duty in guarding prisoners-of-war, and that it “wasn’t much of a show, in any case.” And we told him in return that the prisoners, far from needing to be guarded, had voluntarily offered to fight the Egyptians, should the place be attacked—which was true enough.

Then the General had the Indian officers paraded before him, and he spoke to them in similar terms. Finally he asked them whether they had any comments

or complaints to make and the Subadar-Major, the senior of them, a man with a sense of humour that is sometimes found in the Rajput caste (of which he was a member) but rarely otherwise, said:

"*Huzur*, we have a very grave complaint. The flour of which we make our *chapatis* is full of weevils," and this without a smile on his face.

General Bulfin was equal to the occasion. "You don't need to worry about them, Subadar-Major Sahib," he answered. "They're clean feeders."!

And so the General went back to Cairo, and we were left to "hold the fort" and live on horseflesh.

In Belbeis, in addition to the two regiments I have mentioned, were a Remount Depot and a Veterinary Hospital. The O.C. of the former happened to be the senior officer in the post, and so he commanded the whole garrison. Every morning he used to conduct the garrison "orderly room"—a sort of military court. One day another officer and I had to attend this orderly room as witnesses in some case or other. We thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, for the Colonel—I forget his name now—was always accompanied by his terrier, Spot, wherever he went, and Spot was with him now and being rather a nuisance.

The Colonel was trying an Egyptian on a charge of petty theft when we entered, and was about to deliver judgment.

"You seem to be an unpleasant fellow," he told the Egyptian. "I don't like you at all. You—— Get down, Spot!"

He jabbed at the dog, which did not seem to like the Egyptian and was beginning to advance towards him, his hackles bristling.

"I suppose you can't help stealing; it's in your blood," the Colonel went on. "I'll—— Get *down*, Spot!



. . . I'll have to punish you, you know. Can't have people like you behaving . . . *Will you get down, Spot, damn your eyes!* . . . "

And so on.

At the end of the sitting he said to me: "Got any liquor up at your mess, Foster?"

"Afraid we haven't, Sir," I answered. "We finished the last drop of whisky last week."

"Why don't you come and see us sometimes?" the Colonel went on. "We've— *Get down, Spot!*—we've got any amount of gin. And we've got one of those soda-making machines, so we can give you gin and ginger beer. Come down this afternoon."

Joyfully I went back to the Dogra mess, and at lunch I passed on the information. Within half an hour a party of six of us were riding down to the Remount Depot mess. All the Remount officers seemed to be there. They poured out gin and ginger beer for us, and we drank gratefully.

Somebody suggested "Whiskey-poker," so we all sat down at the big mess table and started to play. Every ten minutes or so we had our glasses refilled with gin and ginger beer. Under the pleasant influence of the drink we grew very merry.

"How did you manage to get hold of all this gin?" I asked the Remount mess secretary during a lull in the game.

He winked. "Don't ask questions," he answered. "There's plenty of it. Drink and be thankful."

So we all had another.

I forget how many drinks we had, but at all events after two hours of this I was feeling as though I had had enough and wondering whether I should be able to ride back. I could drink plenty of whisky in those days—as all of us could—but gin was an unaccustomed

beverage, and besides, I had heard that it made one melancholy. I suggested that we returned.

I think we had all had enough. But our hosts insisted on our having one more "for the road."

"You shall have it neat this time," said the mess secretary, "a stirrup cup."

He poured out a stiff peg for each of us. We solemnly toasted our hosts and drank. It was water!

One of our fellows spluttered. "Rotten joke!" he grumbled. "Is the gin finished?"

Then our host doubled up with laughter.

"That's what you've been drinking in your ginger beer all the time," he bellowed.

It was a good joke. If it had been sustained throughout all the time of the Egyptian "trouble" and we had made a daily pilgrimage to the Remount Depot to partake of such hospitality we might have endured the drink famine more philosophically.

Talking of drink! There was a Scottish officer in the A.S.C. at that time stationed at Jerusalem who had a marked partiality for Johnny Walker "Black Label," and who would drink no other. (One of our officers who had been on leave to Jerusalem told me about him.) And there happened to be a café at Port Said at which this particular brand of whisky could be obtained—the only place in all Egypt, in fact. Every Saturday, at noon, the Scot used to journey down by train to Kantara, cross the Suez Canal on foot over the bridge and take a train thence to Port Said. In the café in question he would sit down, call for a bottle of Johnny Walker "Black Label" and a glass and solemnly drink it all. Then he would go into the backyard and make himself sick and return and drink another bottle similarly. Again he would make himself sick and then tackle a third bottle. Then he would, without having

said a word to anyone, return solemnly to Kantara, and boarding a ration train, travel back to Jerusalem.

This was a weekly pilgrimage, and it had gone on, I was told, since the Armistice was signed. Such single-minded devotion is rare.

Egypt was now under martial law. The insurrection was, however, dying down, and the task of the military was to find the ringleaders and try them. Once my regiment went to the neighbouring Shebin-el-Kanatre and scoured local villages for wanted men.

I look back on that expedition with a good deal of shame, for in the course of it I shot a man who was trying to escape. True, he was not killed; and equally true, I was only doing my duty. But I knew nothing of the causes of the insurrection. It may have been that the Egyptians were perfectly justified in revolting. After all, Egypt was their country, not ours.

And often I was a member of a Military Court which had to try these poor wretches and sentence them. I know we officers all hated the task. Many of us, perhaps, secretly sympathised with those we had to condemn. I am quite sure the High Command did, for almost invariably the sentences which we passed—and which were laid down for us in the manual—were mercifully reduced when they were referred to Cairo for approval.

I went down to Zagazig with an armed guard the day after the railway line was repaired, in order to draw pay for the regiment. It happened, too, that I was the first officer to travel in the opposite direction—that is, to Cairo—for the day following I had to proceed to Zeitun on a Musketry Course.

That was a satisfactory Course so far as I was concerned, for though I lost a week's instruction out of the four on account of an ankle badly sprained when I

jumped into a trench, I managed to get a "Distinguished" certificate and—despite the after-effects on my eyes of the blowing-up of the German wire in my last trench raid in France—I achieved second place in marksmanship.

As I look back on the events of 1919 I can never remember the sequence of them. But very clearly I recall that I had not been back with my regiment from Zeitun more than a few days before the C.O. was ordered to detail one officer to proceed to India from Suez on special duty.

None of us wanted the job. We were a happy family, and we knew there was a risk that once an officer had been detailed for outside duty it might be months before he returned. I believe the C.O. protested to the Higher Command that with a couple of fellows on leave we were short-handed—an Indian regiment has only a dozen British officers—and we thought he had won his point.

But the following afternoon, while, owing to the terrific heat of a *Khamsin* wind, I was lying on my bed in my tent, I was summoned to the Orderly Room.

"I'm sorry, Foster," the C.O. said, "but you'll have to go on this job to India. There's a train leaving Belbeis at six. You'll have to catch that because the ship leaves Suez at daybreak."

I had exactly two hours to prepare for the long voyage. I told Durasingham to bundle necessities only into my valise and to pack his own things too—for he would, of course, accompany me. He rode in a limbered wagon with the kit to the station, and I went on horseback.

I arrived at Suez late that night and went to the only hotel that god-forsaken hole boasted in those days, hoping to snatch a few hours' sleep before I need embark.

You will see later that this second voyage to India marked the beginning of the next phase of my life.

## CHAPTER XII

THE RED HILLS of Mokattam threw back the early morning light as the ship thrust her way southwards out of Suez. A mist lay on the oily water, and already the heat was oppressive. Before us were several days of Purgatory, for the Red Sea in June is about the most torrid place on earth.

We were bound for Karachi with a cargo of horses and mules that were being shipped from the Palestine war-area to India. I have forgotten how many of them there were, but they numbered hundreds. Additionally were a few score officers and Indian soldiers going to India on duty or on leave. I was Adjutant of the ship—an old Russian boat that had somehow come into British possession.

As the day grew older the heat became intense. The veterinary officer in charge of the animals opined that we should lose half of them before we reached Aden.

The holds in which the horses and mules were quartered were like furnaces; the atmosphere was heavily charged with acrid ammonia from the poor beasts' stale and dung. It made one's eyes smart and water intolerably.

Some holds were cooler than others, so we arranged to change the animals round daily so that they might all benefit and suffer alike. Two of them had colic and were being treated.

One of the two died that evening. We heaved it overboard. At once the water was alive with sharks.

I could see that an unpleasant time lay ahead. Before I had got to the end of that voyage I was cursing

the authorities bitterly, for not only was this the worst month of all as regards heat for the transshipment of animals, but in the Indian Ocean the south-west monsoon was raging. There was no possible excuse for transporting the beasts to India at this time. Forgotten altogether was the fact that they had served us faithfully throughout the Palestinian campaign, and that they had suffered more than the troops had borne. They were now no longer wanted in Palestine or Egypt and were to be sold in India.

For hours on end we worked every day in those awful holds, doing what we could for the animals. Wearing only shorts though we were, yet after every half hour or so we had to seek the deck because the atmosphere and heat below were so intolerable. By the third day we had lost a number of the horses and several of the mules. Sharks were following the ship in droves.

At length we drew abreast of Perim, and the awful heat abated. As we sat on deck in the evening coolness one of the officers asked me if I knew anything about the island.

"Not much," I said.

"There's a company of Indian troops under a couple of British officers there," he told me. Then he chuckled. "At least there should be two."

"Do you mean that there's really only one?" I exclaimed, thinking how intolerably lonely it must be for one white man in that desolate isle.

My companion chuckled again. "I don't know what happens now," he said, "but in the old days there was always one on leave," he explained. "You see, after the company had been there about a year—forgotten, it seemed—the senior of the two officers applied to India for home-leave. There was no reply. He applied again. Still no reply. But this wasn't surprising

because they never got a reply to any communication. Their rations were brought regularly, and that was all. Then, one day, he said he was going to take French leave, so he packed his traps and got a dhow to take him across to Aden, and from there he got a boat home."

"And then?" I prompted.

"Well, he came back at the end of six months and shoved his subaltern off similarly."

I was sceptical and said so.

"Maybe you're right," my companion said. "Anyhow, the story goes that they kept this up for three years until one day when the senior was on French leave he ran into his C.O. in London. Then the fat was in the fire."

True or not, it was a good tale.

"I suppose there are people other than troops in Perim," I said.

"Some Arabs," I was told. "A queer lot. They migrated from the mainland a long time ago on account of religious difficulties, and they're all as mad as hatters now—consanguinity, of course."

When we reached Aden we went ashore to stretch our legs,—for our ship was only a small one of about 4,000 tons. Then that evening we put to sea again.

And what a sea it was! The monsoon was at its height and blew in an unceasing roar. The night was so black that one could not see across the deck. The poor old boat tossed and rolled and pitched and corkscrewed, every plank and rivet in her complaining noisily. Every now and again, as the stern lifted clean out of the water and the propellers raced, she shuddered like a wild thing.

When I went to bed that night I lay listening a long while to the din of wind and sea and ship and wondered why my stomach did not feel queasy.

Next morning the veterinary officer reported that three animals had broken their legs in the night owing to the movement of the ship. He had shot them. We heaved them overboard into that turbulent sea.

There was no need now to shift the poor beasts round, for the air in the holds was cold. We did all we could to prevent them from falling and injuring themselves, but that was not much.

During the day the wind seemed if anything to increase. In such a small ship as ours we experienced the full fury of the storm. Only the vet. and another officer and myself had so far managed to escape seasickness. Even the mate of the vessel had, to his shame, succumbed. I do not know whether my immunity was due to luck, but the captain had advised Guinness's stout and cheese as the best preventative, and I must say the mixture had marvellous results on those of us who tried it!

The following day several of the officer passengers—and also the mate—had recovered. Not so my immediate superior—the military O.C. ship, Captain Williams. He stayed in his cabin for the rest of the voyage!

When we were about three days from Karachi we had a particularly bad time with the animals. In the evening after dinner the mate, two of the military officers and I were sitting in the saloon playing bridge when the door burst open and the vet. staggered in. At first we thought that the violent motion of the ship was responsible for the manner of his entry, but so soon as he started to speak we knew that he was drunk.

"Got to go and shoot a damned horse," he announced, showing us a revolver.

The mate nudged me. "He mustn't!" he whispered urgently. "He's dangerous."



"Better not, old chap," I said to the vet. "I'll do it for you."

He lost his temper at once. We all tried to soothe him—for he was brandishing the pistol in a formidable manner.

"Nobody's going to stop me," he shouted. "Think I'm drunk, do you? Well I can bloody well shoot straight, anyhow."

I hated to have to do it, but there was no alternative.

"Johnson," I said—that was not his name; I have forgotten it—"I'm sorry, but I shall have to give you an order. You are not to shoot a horse to-night. You'd better go to your cabin."

We were all on our feet now. Swaying and his face mottled, Johnson glared at me, menacing me—though perhaps not with intent—with the revolver. He started to curse, and refused to obey. There was only one thing left that I could do.

"In that case," I said, "I shall have to put you under open arrest. You will go to your cabin at once and stay there."

You might think that armed and in the condition that he was, such an order would have been futile, but ordinarily it would have sufficed, for the man was a commissioned officer, though not a combatant, and his sense of discipline ought to have been strong enough to cause the command to achieve the right result. Indeed, I thought that it had, for without a word he turned and went outside.

"He's not safe even now," one of my companions said. "We must try to get that pistol away from him."

We abandoned our game and began to talk, still standing. We had all been upset by the scene, for to

put an officer under arrest was a serious matter and meant that he would be court-martialled.

A knock at the door. A sepoy entered and salaamed. He said that Williams *sahib* wanted the Adjutant *sahib* in his cabin.

"That means that Johnson's been to him," said one of my companions. "We'd better go too. We are witnesses."

Followed by the others, I went up the companion-way and along the deck in the stygian raging darkness. Williams's cabin was on this deck. The door was opened. Clinging to the handle of it and in his pyjamas the O.C. stood with Johnson alongside.

"What's all this about your putting Johnson under open arrest?" Williams demanded.

I started to tell him. Suddenly Johnson made a dive for me and grasped me round the middle. He was a big man, and he raised me as he might a child and heaved me on to the ship's rail, apparently meaning to get me overboard.

The attack was so sudden that we had all been taken by surprise. I was hanging right over the sea, and had prevented myself from falling overboard only by grabbing the rail and crooking my legs over it. For a few moments I hung, the spray from the waves thrashing against the ship's side drenching my head. Then someone hauled me back. Two of the officers were struggling with Johnson.

"That, I think, justifies your putting Johnson under *close* arrest," I said to the O.C.

It is charitable to assume that Williams was too much bemused by seasickness to realise what he was doing. I cannot now remember what he said, but anyhow he was indecisive and did not do as I suggested. Meanwhile Johnson seemed to have sobered down

somewhat, and his captors took him away to his cabin. When they returned they had his revolver.

Next morning—no; we hadn't forgotten the horse that had broken its leg; he had been dealt with—next morning the wind had died. We were within two days of India and under the lee of the land. I went along to Williams's cabin for orders.

"About Johnson," he said nervously. "I've seen him. He's willing to apologise. Will you——?" He stopped.

"An apology isn't much use," I pointed out. "He's under arrest."

"That means a court-martial. It means staying in India until it takes place," Williams said. "I don't want to do that. I want to get back to Egypt as soon as possible. So do you, don't you?"

"Of course, but——"

"Well, then, suppose we forget all about it?"

I was uncertain what the position was in military law, and we had no books on board to which I might have referred. I did not think it possible, however, for an officer to be taken out of arrest until acquittal by a court-martial, and said so.

"You are the only person concerned," Williams said. "And Johnson didn't know what he was doing. He's promised me he won't get drunk again."

Well, the upshot of it was that nothing more was said about the matter. But the other officers were not so sure of Johnson as the O.C. was, and insisted, when we slept on deck that night—for the sea was now calm and the heat was again intense—, on barricading my bed with their own. They seemed to think that Johnson regarded me as an enemy and that if he got drunk again, unpleasant things might be attempted.

But we reached Karachi without incident. When

we unloaded the unfortunate horses and mules, the poor beasts went mad with relief and excitement, and we had difficulty in corralling them. The casualty list we had to render to the Embarkation Officer was a sad one.

We officers were told we should be accommodated at a rest camp just outside the city, and thither we went.

This return to India was bound, of course, to revive memory of Ananda, the "fortune-teller." I had, as it happened, completely forgotten him until about a day's distance from Karachi. The ship had been sailing smoothly through the Indus-stained yellow sea, which was a still and sheltered lake, and I watched the little current-lanes that marked its surface and led into the mysterious distances. Then suddenly I recalled how the last time I had come to India I had been taken ill while still a day from land. This, of course, started a train of thought which inevitably led to that "fortune-telling" in Colaba Hospital. I recollected the details of the prophecy.

It was with not a little shock that I found that so far it had "come true." I had gone overseas to a war front at once despite the fact that as a newly-joined officer I should have stayed a full year in India. Further, as the man had forecast, although I had been with the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in Palestine I had seen no further fighting.

After I reached the rest camp at Karachi I thought much about Ananda. I felt that somehow I had to see him again. He had deliberately entered my life, and I was sure that there was purpose in the event. How or why I could not imagine. Indeed, I had no ideas about the matter at all. It is true that during my stay in Egypt I had collected quite a large library of

books about India; for native Indian officers had interested me considerably in the philosophy of the country, and I wanted, too, to understand their outlook on life. Indeed, among my books was a very rough translation of part of the Hindu Scripture. But I had not thought much about Ananda at all till now.

I could not hope to see him. So far as I knew I should stay several days in Karachi and then be shipped back to Egypt. There was no apparent chance of going to Bombay.

On the fourth day, however, I received orders to proceed to Bombay on a B. I. boat. I embarked two days later with Williams and reached Bombay in due course.

In 1919 the Afghan War was still in progress. Williams and I had no sooner landed than the Embarkation Officer told us we should probably be sent up to the Frontier. We both protested, the reason being that one of the worst things that can befall an officer is to be drafted to a regiment he knows nothing of when that regiment is on active service. To have to command in warfare men whom one does not know and to be subordinate to entirely strange superior officers in such circumstances is a dreadful ordeal.

Williams and I were told to go to an hotel and await orders, so we went to the Taj Mahal. In a couple of days, to our relief, we were instructed to embark on a hospital ship for Egypt four days later—we were to be accommodated on a hospital ship because, owing to the post-war rush of people in the Orient to get to England, all the liners were crammed to capacity.

I had four days, therefore, in which to find Ananda, and I had not the least notion how even to begin the task. I had already enquired about him at Colaba Hospital without result. It was unfortunate, too—

or seemed to be—, that Williams clung to me like a leech.

On the fourth day of our week's stay in Bombay we went up Malabar Hill—as every visitor to Bombay is bound to do—in the morning. In the afternoon Williams said that he was tired and would lie down. Free at last I went down to the shore at Colaba. I had no real idea in my head; indeed, all I wanted to do was to think—to think, if possible, of a way of finding Ananda—, and I chose the shore because the city was very noisy to one who had been accustomed to the deep and satisfying silence of the Libyan Desert.

I found Ananda sitting on a rock, staring into a pool in which a large crab had taken refuge. I recognised him at once. Indeed, when I had seen the still figure some distance away I knew, although I could not see his face, that it was Ananda.

My shadow fell across the pool. He turned slowly. He stood up, and I was surprised to see how tall he was—I do not know why this had escaped me at our first meeting.

“*Salâm, huzur*,” he said softly. “So you have come back?”

“You knew I had gone away?” I asked in return, after answering his greeting. I spoke unconsciously in Urdu, and was at once sorry, for his English was infinitely better.

He smiled. “You have learnt a great deal of Urdu,” he complimented me. “But I do not speak it well. It is only a camp language, you know.”

This, of course, was true, for Urdu, or Hindustani, is a sort of Esperanto invented for his mixed soldiery by the Great Moghul.

“Let us talk English,” I said. “. . . I have been trying to find you.”

"I know," he answered. "I could not help, unfortunately."

I was conscious that his bearing and manner were quite different from what they were at our first meeting. Then he had been deferential, even ingratiating; now——

"Shall we sit down?" he said, seating himself again on the rock. He glanced down at the crab and then at the rising tide. "Well, my son," he went on in his soft voice, "why have you sought the old fortune-teller?"

"Because you are not a mere fortune-teller," I said. "I don't understand what it all means. I don't even understand why I've tried to find you again. But here I am, anyhow."

"It is good," he told me, "that you are of a mind to submit to Fate. 'There is a destiny that shapes our ends. . . .' Unfortunately, most people interpose their own will and make the direction of Fate impossible."

"Do you really believe that?" I asked.

"Examine your own life," he answered. "Whenever you took what Fate offered you, were not the consequences seemingly ordained? On the other hand, whenever you have deliberately planned the next move in your life have you not been disappointed in the result?"

"But the man who plans his life," I protested, "is the man who makes a success of it."

"Success!" Ananda echoed. "You mean that because he has achieved ambition he has seemed to be successful. But of what use, my son, is the gaining of this, that and the other if it is ultimately purposeless? . . . You are to think in terms of eternity. Material achievement does not satisfy a man who has really developed a soul—something that will survive his death."

"But all this is mere speculation," I said. "After all, belief in survival is only belief; survival isn't necessarily a fact. I used to believe in survival. I neither believe nor disbelieve now. These last few years——"

"I know," Ananda interrupted. "Doubt is the very beginning of intelligence. Not until you have begun to doubt can you start to create for yourself, for what you have previously believed in is merely what you have been taught, which is of no value to anyone."

I looked a question.

"You are the creator of your own universe and your own future," he went on. "You will learn in time that nothing was made in the fabled 'beginning.' God creates now, and He creates through His creation. You have mind; that mind is part of the mind of God. As it visualises, so it creates; the subjective becomes the objective. The very stars that you see exist in your mind before they exist in space."

"I don't understand that," I said.

"Listen, then," he answered. "Not that you will understand when I have told you; but you will take this away with you, and later on—perhaps years later on—you will suddenly comprehend. . . . First, let us assume that God exists. What is He like?"

"He is a spirit," I answered promptly, looking out to sea and wondering for the thousandth time whether God was real or no.

"But spirit is simply the antithesis of matter," Ananda objected. "If matter does not exist——"

"But we know it does," I interrupted.

"Your western science," Ananda said, "will tell you—and this idea will grow during the next twenty years—that the ultimate 'particle' of matter is the electron; and an electron is simply electricity—energy, that is. You may know that an atom consists only of electrons



and space; the electrons move in the confines of an atom just as the planets move within the confines of the solar system; and they are *relatively* as distant one from another, as the planets are."

"Yes, but——"

"And atoms in conjunction," Ananda went on, unheeding, "make molecules and molecules cells—yet the basis remains the same. It is simply electrical energy. This is as much the ultimate constituent of light and scent as it is of solid matter. Any modern scientific text-book will tell you that."

I was still only twenty-three, and I had never thought of matter in that way before.

"But how," I asked, "does the illusion of density—weight—appearance—arise?"

"‘Illusion’ is the right word," Ananda answered. "When atoms are conjoined and molecules are conjoined ‘appearance’ comes into being. Yet nothing has been interposed. The ultimate so-called ‘particle’ still remains the invisible, formless electron. What gives it appearance is mind. The electrons are conceptual energy of the Mind of God. He thinks; this is His thinking. The universe is a thought-form; so are all the phenomena in it. They exist in the Mind of God, and only mind can realise them—re-conceive them. You have the parallel in wireless telegraphy. One instrument sends out electrical energy; others receive and reconstitute it. It is we—not God—who make matter, who invest the Divine pictures with objective appearance. Our minds receive them and——"

"But that means," I exclaimed, "that our senses do not photograph; they—they——" I stopped, unable to express myself.

"Exactly," said Ananda. "It is our minds which receive the pictures from the Divine Mind, and we

project them through our senses so that they become objective. The fact that we all see the same things is explained by the fact that we all receive the same impressions."

I stared out to sea, trying to understand this.

"God is mind, not spirit," Ananda said. "We talk—or at least Hindus talk—of the Mind of God, just as though God had a body and as though His Mind were in His head. But God is all-Mind—Mind and nothing else. We are all-mind too—that is to say, all that is real about us is mind. . . . Now tell me, my son; does not a man dwell in his own mind? You would say that you dwell in the world, but apart from the fact that the world is a subjective creation projected through your own senses, do you not really dwell in your own mind in another way? Your true self reposes in your thoughts, many of which are not objectified. Isn't that so?"

"Yes," I answered.

"What has God—all-Mind—to dwell in but His Own Thoughts?"

"And we are His Thoughts," I said.

"Exactly," answered Ananda. "He has His Being in Us. His Thoughts are Himself, which is to say that we are God—or rather, the evidence of God."

"But that means," I said, "that God is not perfect."

"What does 'perfect' mean? It is simply a realisation that improvement is possible. Man has always visualised God as being better than himself, but only relatively better; the extent of man's visualisation of the perfection of God is dependent on to what pitch he has arrived in evolutionary development. Modern man is infinitely superior to the God that our ancestors three thousand years ago visualised."

Ananda stopped speaking, and I was silent. The advancing water had almost reached our feet now; a cool wind was blowing in-shore.

"You are going back to Egypt again shortly," Ananda said at last. "Take these thoughts with you—and one other."

"What is the other?" I asked, not realising that I had not told him that I was returning to Egypt within a couple of days.

"This," said Ananda. "Most men's reasoning consists entirely in trying to justify themselves—to defend, that is, their mere beliefs. Don't defend beliefs, for they are not worth defence. When you try to reason do so for the purpose always of seeking Truth. Nothing else matters. The true purpose of life is not furthered by pursuing any other cause. Nobody has ever profited by striving for wealth, fame, honour or power. True happiness comes of alliance with God, and alliance with God comes, not of prayer and fasting and piety, but of knowledge. It is knowledge that brings freedom, for it brings that so-called spiritual power that controls one's state of *being* instead of one's mere physical conditions. . . . And now, good-bye, my son." He ended with a joke. "If we stay here any longer we shall be drowned!"

## CHAPTER XIII

AND SO BACK to Egypt through the still-raging monsoon and the grilling heat of the Red Sea. And all the way I pondered on Ananda. I do not think it is possible for me to describe what I felt. All such talk as Ananda had indulged in was quite new to me. It was true that in my Chelsea days I had listened to and joined in much discussion of the type that nowadays is called "highbrow," but nobody that I had known had spoken as Ananda had done.

Consider, too, the circumstances—the circumstances of my first meeting with him and those of the second. Why had he singled me out in the first place? What was the origin of his uncanny powers?

Above all other feelings that I had was the impression that the mysterious Indian spoke "*as one having authority.*" I confess that though I had deliberately sought him again—though, indeed, it was plainly he, not I, who had effected the second meeting—I was vaguely afraid. My Christian background was responsible, of course. Training told me to regard Ananda and all his kind as heathens who, if they had any supernatural power at all, must necessarily be in league with the Devil.

Nevertheless there was a factor that warred with this conventional attitude—the conviction gained from my experience in the war, that Christianity was a spent force. If it was spent it could not possibly have a divine origin, I argued. I could not doubt that it was spent, for it had been entirely without effect on the men who had fought and suffered and died in France and Flanders. Though they were face-to-face

with eternity they had entirely rejected Christianity. Even the very chaplains behaved as though they did not believe the Gospel they preached. Stay-at-home parsons would deny all this, but it is the truth.

And what did the Gospel mean, in any case? I argued. Its central point was that every man had a soul to save, that the next life was more important than the present life. But men had laid down their lives not, like Mohammedans, in order to gain eternal bliss, but in defence of the things *of this life*. Moreover, how stupid, I argued, was the notion that we lived this life in order to qualify for a better one! If God wanted us in the hereafter why did He not dispense with this present world altogether?

Christ had redeemed us, said the Church. From what? From sin, of course. But whence was Sin? From the Devil. God and Devil warred continually, and the battle-ground was unfortunate man, who had to bear the consequences if God failed in the fight. What a senseless, unjust arrangement!

So, you see, I was in no respect a Christian. I was too full of doubt and criticism. Nevertheless, I had imbibed Christianity with my mother's milk and—as I was to learn later on—habits of thought can never be entirely eradicated.

When finally I reached my regiment at Belbeis I think I began a new life, though outwardly I had not changed. I spent much time alone. This, as it happened, was not difficult to arrange, for I was appointed Transport Officer, and thus was considerably detached from ordinary regimental work. Moreover, I did much horse-riding alone. The reason was that we had about a hundred mules and twelve horses to keep exercised. The Transport men used to take out the mules every day, and because but few of the officers were enthusiastic

horsemen I used to exercise most of their mounts. Indeed, I often spent as much as eight hours a day in the saddle.

The desert offered ample facilities. Its vast distances allured. To go right out of sight of camp and of all life, save the vultures, to halt on a sandhill and survey that great, shimmering emptiness, to lie in the hot sand and dream and try to understand the purpose of life—these things became, for the time being, all that I desired. Gaining boldness every day, I went further and further afield. When the wind was still the great silence beat in my ears. I would try to imagine an empty universe—just silence.

And at night I always slept in the open. When the noise of the camp was stilled I would lie awake staring at the quiet stars. I watched the vast orderly procession across the heavens and tried to picture, in that deep silence, what the cosmos would look like to a being who existed outside it all.

Outside it all? Was there an outside? As yet Einstein's theory of a finite universe had not become a popular notion. Even if it had been I should still have reflected that there could be nothing outside the whole; that the universe could not just be floating, as it were, in Nothing.

Several miles from camp was a dump of dead horses and mules. Animals that the authorities had no further use for were taken out to this spot, slaughtered and their carcasses left for wolves and jackals to pick; then when the bones were bleached they were removed, for these had a commercial value.

Just before a duststorm the wind always veered in the easterly direction in which the dump was, and the stench that came to us was such that we were in sheer misery. Often did my stomach protest against

that stink of corruption, so that I had to vomit. For there were hundreds of carcasses out there in the desert, mouldering under the strong sun; the loathsome vultures and the few wolves and jackals which fed on this charnel-ground could make little impression on the plethora of dead flesh.

Several times I rode out to the dump—ostensibly to hunt wolves. Curiously enough, the smell was not so abominable—because it was not concentrated—when one was on the spot. But it was a ghastly place, for the horses had been skinned so soon as they were killed. I used to force myself to inspect the remains—I cannot tell you why. On one such occasion a newly-killed and newly-skinned horse kicked violently. Almost panic took possession of me. I thought that the poor brute was still alive—though skinned—, and I drew my pistol, meaning to shoot it through the head. Then I realised that the kicking resulted from post-mortem muscular action.

How long did life take to leave a “dead” body? I wondered. Did it depart at once? And what was it that departed and yet left energy that caused the limbs to kick? I had seen this same muscular movement in dead men. I had seen chickens fly when their heads had been chopped off.

Cheerfully I slew vultures and jackals and wolves when I found them feeding in this awful place, yet my attitude towards these beasts was utterly unreasonable, and I knew it. I, too, ate dead meat, only before it stank—when I could. Every creature on earth was, I would reflect, the tomb of countless others; the very vegetation fed upon decaying vegetation.

Morbid thoughts, of course, but they were a necessary prelude to a better appreciation of life. I wondered how men could think of God as being the embodiment

of love when He had ordained that His creatures prey on one another. I reflected that no love evidenced itself in nature. An owl would capture rabbits and birds, and in order to ensure that its food was fresh, would not kill them outright but would break their legs and wings and so keep them in captivity till they were needed; there was a fish which preyed on the great whale, gradually killing it in order solely that it might feast on its tongue; certain creatures devoured their prey alive and digested it while still living.

Yet Christianity taught that God was love and that the infinitely tender Father was cognisant of and presumably ordained even the fall of a sparrow to the ground.

In this mood I hated the existing order of things. Pain and terror stalked the world, and God had ordained it. Was it possible that man—certain men, that is—was superior to God in that he could feel revolted by the cruelty in the lesser creation? Many people were vegetarians because they disliked the idea of destroying life in order to obtain food. Yet even vegetarianism was futile. Had not the Indian, Dr. Jagadis Chandra Bose, recently discovered that plants experience pain exactly the same as the animal creation do? To live one was compelled to destroy.

Strange thoughts for a soldier!

In this wise the year 1919 drew to its close. But I was by no means idle. For one thing, the C.O., knowing my interest in gardening, had suggested to me one day that it might be possible to make a garden round the reed hut which served as our mess. The desert sand was reputed to be fertile enough—certainly it had lain fallow for many thousands of years!

Accordingly I asked the officer commanding the prisoners-of-war for labourers and was allotted about



twenty. Then I sent all our limbered wagons to the Sweetwater Canal to bring up mud. This was mixed with manure from the Transport and with the desert soil, and we enclosed a garden round the mess with mud walls to keep off the drifting sand. When all this was done I went to Cairo for seeds.

The result of all this labour was that within a few months we not only had a flower-garden of surprising beauty, and creepers covering the mess, but I was growing vegetables and fruit of all kinds. Our half acre of kitchen garden supplied us with onions, carrots and many other root vegetables, besides such things as bananas—I obtained plants from the local *mudir*. The mess benefited. It benefited still more when I started also a small stock farm in the Transport lines. I bred goats, rabbits, chickens and pigeons, and soon we had all the fresh meat we needed and at very little cost.

Then the men of the regiment started making gardens round their tents also—limbered wagons were now continuously bringing up mud from the canal, and we had an unlimited supply of manure. The result was that the camp became a place of green beauty and there was an ample supply of fresh vegetables for officers and men alike—an incalculable boon.

I had one prisoner-of-war—an Anatolean nearer eighty than seventy—as a permanent gardener. Especially privileged, he was allowed to sleep with the mess servants instead of returning to the barbed wire enclosure every night. Poor old man, he wept bitterly when finally he was repatriated. On his knees before me and embarrassingly kissing my boots, he begged me to take him back to India with me; but this was a responsibility I dared not assume.

Additionally I was hard-worked where the animals were concerned, for they were continually contracting colic. After every dust-storm—and these were of very frequent occurrence—sand would get in their fodder and, swallowed, would form a hard ball inside them. When the illness made itself apparent I would dose them with aloes and try to massage the obstruction through the bowels. Often I had to bare my arm and thrust it up the anus of a horse or mule and seek the sandball in that way.

Mules were much more intelligent than horses in this respect. Whereas a horse did all it could to prevent one from aiding it, a mule would submit without the least fuss. But then mules are much more intelligent than horses in every respect.

Despite all this work I still rode far into the desert. Away to the eastward lay the Mokattam Hills, red brown in the distance. These were mysterious to us. None of us had ever been there. And I resolved to go.

One day, therefore, when I was free I started out across the desert on my favourite mount, a waler that was quite tireless if allowed to lope along in the Australian fashion.

I knew from a study of the map that the Mokattam Hills covered a vast tract of country and that I must not penetrate them, otherwise I should surely come to grief.

Past the horse dump, therefore, I went on my waler, and at last, sweating hard from the long ride in the great heat, I came to the foothills. There I gave the horse a rest and a feed from the nosebag I had brought and ate sandwiches myself.

When I stopped munching and the horse too no longer champed I became aware of the intense silence. Apart from the noise of the wind, I reflected, no sound

had ever broken the stillness of this place for thousands of years. The usual caravan route from Cairo to Suez was, I knew, many miles away.

The craggy limestone, shimmering in the sunflood, filled me with awe. To such a place as this—but in Sinai, not far away—had Moses gone after he had murdered the Egyptian. There he had seen visions and heard voices—visions, no doubt, formed of “sand-devils,” mirage and the voices of the wind in the hollow places of the hills. No wonder that after many days he thought he had talked with God.

So far up the heights as I dared take my horse I climbed and thence surveyed the westward desert and the tumbled land of the hills. I was alone in the world. There was no sight of man or of the habitation of man anywhere.

And now I could hear a thin whisper of wind through the gully. The sun had passed its zenith; the wind grew; it made an organ sound that somehow seemed like the keynote of a harmony which sun and sand and red hills together formed.

The horse was becoming uneasy. His ears were well pricked forward; he was staring intently across a gully. Twice, as I watched, he tossed his head.

I knew the signs well enough. The horse had sensed danger. At the most, I thought, it could be only a wolf. Yet the horse was used to wolves, for I had hunted them. Shielding my eyes I stared across the gully. I saw white against the red of the hill.

I recognised it at once. It was a tomb. There are many such isolated white pillars dotted about the deserts of the East; they mark the burial places of Mohammedan saints and are often places of pilgrimage. Sometimes, too, one finds a hermit in such a spot.

The tomb would not have worried the horse, I

reflected; there must be a man there. Well, he was harmless enough, no doubt.

I took the horse's bridle and patting his neck reassuringly, began to lead him across the gully. He was well-trained, and though obviously still ill at ease, did not resist. As I drew near I saw that my surmise was right. The white column indeed marked a tomb, and sitting alongside it was a man in a brown robe. Though he must have observed me, he was staring, motionless, across the desert.

I had enough Arabic to be able to carry on a simple conversation. I gave the silent figure greeting, and not wanting to seem to intrude, told him at once that I would not stay if I disturbed him.

And then I had a shock. His face was dark brown under the cloth he wore turban-wise on his head, but his eyes were blue. He turned them on me.

"You are alone," he said in English, more in statement than in question, though a question was meant.

The English startled me. I became of a sudden convinced that he was a fellow-countryman.

Then his face creased into a smile. "How expressive you are!" he said. "Yes; I am English. What then?"

I do not remember what I said in reply. Probably it was nothing intelligible. To cover my confusion I sat down, still holding my horse's bridle. But I need not have worried about the animal. He seemed quite at ease now. I knotted the bridle to shorten it, so that he would not catch a foreleg in it, and let him free, knowing that he would come to me so soon as I called. And all this I did in order to avoid talking. I hoped that the stranger would speak again first. He did.

"You have come from Belbeis?" he half-questioned, half-stated. "I saw you riding from that direction; and I know, of course, there are soldiers there."

"Yes," I said, and added: "You are sure you don't mind my disturbing you?", repeating what I had said at the start. It was an odd question to iterate, but I wanted him to know that I had no desire to intrude on his privacy. He was as much entitled to privacy there in those lonely hills as I would have been in my tent in camp—more so, in fact.

"No, I do not mind," he answered, in his precise fashion—as though it were a long time since he had used English and had forgotten how to abbreviate—"so long as you bring no one else here. I do not think you would do that."

"No," I said; "I wouldn't do that. Will you tell me why you are here?"

"Just to be alone," he answered briefly.

Abashed I asked: "But how do you manage to live?—I mean, how do you get food?"

"There is a village over there." He pointed vaguely eastward. "They bring me food—or I fetch it."

Then silence fell between us. I looked to where he had been staring—across the tumbled sand to the south where the distant pyramids of Gizeh lay. I suppose that full fifteen minutes passed in this wise. The desire to speak, to question left me. There was no sound but that organ note of the freshening wind and the "glint-glint" of metal as my horse nosed for vegetation and the rings of his snaffle bit rubbed together. Above a hollow in the sand a mirage shimmered.

I wanted to stay there indefinitely, but the sun was now well west of south, and I might not tarry much longer. I had no mind to ride back so late that darkness would come before I had crossed the intervening desert.

I forced myself to look at my silent companion.

"I must go," I said softly.

"And you have asked no questions beyond the first few!" he answered. "Sir, you have the precious gift of being incurious."

"But I *am* curious," I answered, "only——"

"—only you respect privacy. You feel that my affairs are no concern of yours. Is that so? Well, then; you have achieved—unconsciously, no doubt—a wisdom that few gain. If you would achieve still greater wisdom quell all curiosity within you regarding other people; and never in any circumstances interfere in their lives."

He seemed to be reproving, yet he was not.

"That is a hard doctrine," I said. "It conflicts with the idea of brotherliness, does it not?"

"By no means," he answered at once. "Help other people, certainly, but never interfere in their lives. They have their own lessons to learn, their own salvation to work out. You can teach them, but you must not interfere in their lives."

This was puzzling indeed.

"Suppose," I said, "I saw a man attacked by another. Should I not interfere?"

"You do not need to ask such questions," replied the hermit. "You know the answer already. When I spoke of interference I was referring to a man's private concerns."

"Suppose I saw a man trying to commit suicide?" I asked.

"His own voluntary act has nothing to do with you," was the answer. "You would be wrong to interfere. A would-be suicide is a victim of himself: you cannot judge whether he is right or wrong, or what the consequences will be. You should leave him alone. It happens that you have instanced an extreme case. To my mind

it is the supreme example of the necessity for not interfering. Every man's life is his own."

"British law does not think on those lines," I observed.

"What then? Is British law sacrosanct? In other countries—in many other countries—the law is different. Would you say that one law is more right in this respect than others? Conscience is above man-made law—and there is no other."

"What of the Ten Commandments?" Even though he were a Moslem—as indeed he seemed to be—I reflected, he would reverence those, for to Moslems—I still supposed that he was of that faith—no less than to Jews, Moses is a prophet.

"Do you think, then, they were of divine origin?" he asked. "Do you really believe they were written on stone by the finger of God? If they were, God would have ensured that they were preserved for all time. Instead they are lost."

I looked at the sun.

"I must go," I said again, regretfully.

He stood up. He was tall and spare and handsomely built.

"I will answer your unspoken questions," he said. "I am a Coptic monk turned hermit. I left our desert monastery in order to live alone in these hills and meditate. You are the first Englishman to find me."

He held out his brown hand, English fashion. "Good-bye, my son," he said. "I think that one day—years hence—you will understand. You are very young yet."

"May I ask one question?" I said diffidently. "Will you stay here always?"

He shook his head and smiled.

"Did the Buddha stay always beneath his tree?" he asked. "No, my son. One day I shall go into the world. Apart from all other considerations, it would

be wrong to let others supply me with food for which I have not worked. . . . And now, good-bye. I trust you not to bring others here, and you must not return yourself."

Then I became aware of a familiar smell. I sniffed the air and made a wry face.

"Yes," said the hermit, "you can smell the dead horses even so far away as this. The wind is veering in that direction." He looked across the desert. "How many are there?" he asked. "I have not seen them, though I have heard much about them."

"Hundreds," I answered.

"Poor animals!" exclaimed my companion. "They served you faithfully in Palestine during the war, bearing the heat and the endless labour, thirst and illness and facing death always; and this is their reward!"

"I suppose," I tried to defend the authorities, "the expense of getting them back to England—or wherever they come from—was too great."

"Their bones are more valuable than their lives. One would have thought they had earned a holiday for the rest of their natural existence. But there; Governments are apt to forget, when a war is over, who bore the burden of it. They forget the toil of the soldiers as well as of the animals—at least, they always have done in the past, and I do not suppose that this war is an exception. Are there many unemployed ex-soldiers in England?"

"I don't know," I answered. "I haven't been home yet."

"I expect there are many," said the Copt. "No doubt the Government are sorry they cannot dispose of them as easily as they did the horses. . . . The poor dumb slaves of man."

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I felt suddenly depressed. Vaguely I had already thought in this way myself, but I had weakly assumed that, not knowing all the circumstances regarding the horses and mules, I was not qualified to have an opinion on the matter. (Later on I was to be horrified when I learnt the extent of this inhumane and wasteful slaughter of animals after the war.)

"Good-bye," I said sadly.

The hermit silently touched his forehead and his breast and bowed. I called my horse. Then, mounting, I rode cautiously across the gully and down on to the plain. A mile or so away I stopped and turned in my saddle. The desolate hills showed no sign of life.

Thoughtfully I resumed my journey. I gave the horse his head and sat easily with loose knees—as the gait of my mount allowed—for I wanted to relax and think.

This careless riding resulted in a spill. The horse put his foot into loose sand and went on to his knees while I catapulted over his head. When I stood up it was to find that the middle finger of my right hand stuck out backwards at a right angle. I tried to pull it into joint, and succeeded, but it would not stay in position.

The pain put all other thoughts from me as I rode the remaining distance, and the sight of my finger at a right angle to the back of my hand was so grotesque that I magnified its importance and was feverishly impatient to be back.

It was many weeks before that finger was normal again.

## CHAPTER XIV

I NEVER WENT TO the hills again, though I often wanted to do so, for I felt that the unique man I had met there—the English Coptic monk turned anchorite—could in his wisdom tell me much that I would like to know. For now I was in the throes of conflict with myself.

Outwardly I think that I was unchanged. I joined in all the usual regimental activities, played hockey—a favourite game with Indians and very fast—with the men and cricket on a matting pitch and polo with officers of the garrison. The 70th Burma Rifles had been relieved by the Scots Greys, and on guest-nights we used to exchange visits to each other's messes. I played and worked as hard as any of them.

Life was strenuous and physically healthy. The mess-garden flourished and became famous even so far away as Cairo; and now that the Egyptian "trouble" was a thing of the past some of the officers of the garrison had brought their wives to live in the place. And I was now senior subaltern, due for my captaincy and so no longer a nonentity.

Outwardly, then, there was no change in me. But inwardly I was in torment—I do not think that that is too strong a word. Despite the fact that I was in an honourable profession and presumably "pulling my weight" as I should be I was unaccountably conscious that my life seemed to be futile. It had no aim. I could envisage years of such existence and at the end a pension and a sheltered life in England. And at the last, I told myself, I should lay myself down to

die. All that I had done would be then of nothing worth.

I had no definite belief concerning an after-life. I could not subscribe to the idea that, according to the way I lived and to whether I accepted Christ's so-called redeeming sacrifice or not, I was destined ultimately for Heaven or Hell. In fact, I did not want to "go to Heaven": it seemed to be a very dull state of existence to me, even assuming that Christian pictures of it were hopelessly inadequate images. Life meant striving and aspiring; if these things were removed, one's existence would be intolerable: literally there would be nothing to live for, whether in a physical or in a spiritual state.

No doubt the desert was affecting me. As I rode and walked alone over the endless sand or stared from my bed at night into the starry firmament I felt that not until I could discover what life actually meant and what was its purpose could I live happily. To know what to strive for one must necessarily understand what the divine purpose was. A Cardinal Newman, full of pious Christian ideals, could say:

"The night is dark, and I am far from home,  
Lead Thou me on.

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
The distant scene; one step enough for me",

but this idea did not help me. "One step" was not enough for me because not only did I not know whither I was bound, but I could not find any reasonable explanation of why I was making a journey. Why the necessity for it? Unless I had lived previous to this life—which is an unChristian idea—I had done nothing to justify God's placing me in this world of

sin and woe. No doubt I ought, I told myself, to be a very much better man, but I had—so far as I knew—not made myself or created my predilections and consequent predisposition to evil. Whatever badness might be in me, I argued, was not there because I willed it. I would rather do good than evil. Besides, what was good, and what was evil?

In short, I was tackling the fundamental problem of life and tackling it alone in the desert. I had no prop, for I had during the previous years discarded Christianity as being merely a traditional set of ideas based on a cosmogony that was in conflict with what modern science had revealed. Furthermore, Christianity insisted that no man could be "saved" except by acknowledging voluntarily the redemptive sacrifice of Christ; and I could not possibly believe that, say, an Indian's chance of salvation depended solely on whether a Christian missionary should happen to preach to him and to convince him that Christ was God.

Were all these splendid sepoys in the 38th Dogras damned because, by an accident of birth and circumstances, they were denied knowledge of Christ and the ability to believe in Him? A monstrous idea, unless one was prepared to believe that God was Himself less reasonable and less loving than I.

No; if Christianity were the religion that I had been taught it was not for me. I had ten thousand times rather be damned for all eternity with the noble-minded Sundar Singh and the splendid Amar Nath, who had rescued his officer from death at the risk of losing his own life, than go to Heaven with mealy-mouthed, mean-minded English shop-keepers who did no productive work of any kind and who had never had a noble thought, much less performed a noble deed, in their lives.

In close touch with Indians and Egyptians, just as I had been previously with Burmans—all three races of different faiths—I was learning much about religion in these days. And what I was discovering was that whereas Christianity and its parent, the Jewish faith, made abominable hypocrites of many so-called religious people, Hinduism, Mohammedanism and Buddhism never in any circumstances seemed to achieve such a result. I knew and had known many really “religious” people of those creeds, yet not by any stretching of definition could they be termed hypocritical. And the reason was, I felt sure, that religion for them was a reality, whereas for the average Christian it was partly superstition and partly a cloak of respectability—and respectability, I was beginning to feel, was the grimmest of all the spectres that haunted the Western world.

It happened that about this time the regimental *munshi*—the officers’ tutor of Urdu—was changed. The new man was a Brahmin and very well educated. Friendship between a British officer and an Indian was—and is still—frowned on, unless the latter happens to be of the ruling class, but this *munshi* and I spent many hours together in my tent. I did not deliberately cultivate the friendship. He came to me of his own accord. He was a *yogi* of very considerable powers. And my lessons in Urdu consisted largely in learning in the native tongue the philosophical system of Hinduism.

How different, I learnt, is this Hinduism from that of popular conception! It has no vague theology behind it. Fundamentally it is the doctrine of evolution—still a mere theory in the West—given a spiritual background. For Hinduism teaches that all life is progressive from the *amoeba* to man and from man endlessly onwards, and that the reason for progression is reincarnation.

It is by experience in the universe of matter that the *monad*—the divine spark that is the ego of every creature—is educated and, hence, evolves to better circumstances.

Not that I was able to believe all that the *munshi* taught me. He did not still the disquiet within me, but he gave me knowledge which was much later on to influence me.

In the men's "lines" was a marquee that was used as a Hindu temple. We British officers, of course, did not enter it. But one night the *Subadar-major* (senior Indian officer) came to my tent and invited me to witness a ceremony that was being performed in honour of a Hindu festival.

I did not want to go, but I went. The sepoys had removed one of the tent "walls" so that I could sit outside and watch—for I might not, as a non-Hindu, enter the temple proper. A fire burnt in the middle of the tent.

The ceremony proceeded to the singing of chants. I watched and listened, realising that though these men were of high caste, yet they did not know so much about the significance of what they were doing as the *munshi* (who sat beside me) did.

Then I became conscious that I was a focus-point of attention. After some minutes the priest bowed to me and signalled to the *Subadar-major*.

"*Huzur*" (Excellency), said the latter to me, "we know your honour's interest in our religion. Will you condescend to eat the sacred sugar with us and to be passed through the fire?"

I knew what this meant. It meant that I could, if I willed, be "baptised" into the Hindu faith. I was stunned, not because of the possibilities but because I had never heard of such an honour—as, of course

it must be considered—being offered to any British officer before.

I did not want to be so initiated. To gain time I invited the *Subadar-major* to explain.

"*Huzur*," he assured me, "it is not to make your honour a Hindu—for to become such you must needs offer yourself. It is a way of tendering your respect and also, since you will share our spiritual food and also the cleansing of the fire, of giving you our loyal friendship."

It was to this effect that he spoke; it is impossible to translate literally.

Whatever this initiation might mean, I told myself, it would not be other, so far as I was concerned, than an act of brotherhood. Was I not prepared to accept these splendid fellows—brave and faithful and true and upright as they were—as my brothers?

I ate the consecrated sugar of the sacrament—the equivalent, as I supposed, of the Bread in the Christian Eucharist—and passed my hands through the purifying flames of the fire. And so I became an "honorary Hindu."

I never had occasion to regret this. On the contrary, these men thereafter showed deep attachment to me, and when, some time later, I transferred to another regiment, the two Hindu companies which it contained—the others were of Mohammedans and Sikhs—seemed to know that I was somehow related to them.

The year wore to its close. The senior officers were now going, one by one, home to England on leave, and I began to hope that by the middle of 1920 my turn would come. And this leave, I reflected, would be the first real one, apart from convalescent leave, I had had since the war started.

It was early in 1920 that I had two nasty accidents, both with horses. The first was brought about by a new horse. It had not been properly broken in, and nobody would ride it—least of all the unfortunate officer to whom it had been allotted. But it had to be exercised, and also it had to be “schooled”; so of course, I had to do what was necessary.

After a fortnight I believed that I had taught it how to behave, but one evening when I mounted it and started to ride, it suddenly reared on its hind legs, and before I could free myself from the stirrups it had fallen over backwards on top of me. Queerly enough, although the full weight of the beast crashed on to me, I suffered no ill effects. That was the last time that horse ever misbehaved itself, for I judged that it would be wise to ride it again at once and did so with a tight martingale. I am afraid I gave the brute a bad half hour, but it was necessary, and the result justified the treatment.

The second accident was with a shortbacked black which we had named Satan. He was a vicious brute whose manners had not been improved by the behaviour of the officer whose charge it was. That officer used, for the sake of effect, to reach back to its tail and irritate it to make the beast buck.

One evening I had occasion to go to the veterinary hospital in the camp to inquire about a horse under treatment, and I rode Satan. The hospital was a large house alongside the canal, and it boasted extensive grounds intersected by metalled roads.

As I was trotting the horse towards the place and crossed the junction of the roads, a limbered wagon that was standing there suddenly began to move. Satan at once took fright and would have bolted but that I applied the rein. He fought control for a time; then



seemed to give in. I loosened the rein. At once he bucked; and taken completely unawares I was shot into the air.

I fell badly. Ducking my head for a roll I crashed on to my back. Meanwhile the horse started forward and gave me a hearty kick on the back of the head.

The next thing I remember was being carried into my tent—I had been taken there in the limbered wagon which had caused the accident. I was unable to move for days: I thought I had broken my back.

In the early Spring of 1920 the prisoners-of-war began to be repatriated. How we used to pity them in their barbed wire enclosures! True, they were well-fed and well-clothed, but when men are kept in such close confinement and herded together unpleasant things are bound to happen. God alone knows what enormities were perpetrated behind that barbed wire at night!

The only times these prisoners left the compounds was when periodically they were marched under escort to the railway station at Belbeis for fumigation.

We would take several hundred prisoners-of-war—there were thousands in the enclosures—at a time. In a siding at the station they had to strip, and while their clothing was baked in a chamber of the special fumigation train, they themselves had to suffer total immersion in a great tank of disinfectant.

And at last they were to be repatriated. Not only that, but we—the 38th Dogras—had to supply the escorts which were to conduct them to Constantinople. We officers envisaged a very pleasant change.

My turn came at last in early July. I have forgotten how many prisoners I had to conduct, but there were several thousand, and the escort consisted of, I think, 40 men. A junior subaltern came as second-in-command to me, and I took my servant with me.

The extraordinary thing was that many of the prisoners did not want to be repatriated. They preferred to live in those vile conditions at Belbeis rather than return to the hardships of their pre-war life.

The party were accommodated in open trucks during the journey to Port Said. I split up the escort as best I could, and my second-in-command and myself occupied the guard's van in the rear.

All went well until in the desert between Tel-el-Kebir and Ismaelia the train stopped. Promptly the prisoners started to climb out of the trucks. I shouted an order for them to get back; then I realised that their intention was innocent enough—they were intent only on relieving themselves. I therefore sent the Indian officer to the engine driver with the instruction that the train was not to start without an order from me.

But do you think I could get those prisoners back into the train? Finally through the interpreter I had to threaten to shoot unless they were back within ten minutes. Not till the ten minutes were nearly up, and I was beginning to sweat—for I did not want to be responsible for killing any of them—did they scamper back.

Well, we reached Port Said without further incident. The transport awaited us. The men were marched on board; then I went into the captain's cabin with the Embarkation Officer. There I learnt that, as O.C. ship, I was responsible not only for the discipline of the returning prisoners, but for a vast quantity of bullion—I was told £1,000,000, but I took this with a grain of salt!—to Constantinople. Furthermore, the strong room, in which the gold was stored, was in the between-deck on which most of the prisoners were "housed."

I promptly put a guard in the strong room and told the sentry to allow no prisoner within three yards of the door.

He wanted to know whether he was to shoot if necessary. I told him to do so only in the last resort. A prick with the bayonet, I said, should be sufficient and less disastrous.

That night we had three prisoners-of-war in the sick bay, and all with superficial bayonet wounds in their behinds! Before the voyage was over the sick bay accommodated twenty prisoners similarly afflicted. I think that a subsidiary instruction that I had issued, to the effect that if the bayonet had to be used the sentry should apply it as mercifully as possible, must have been the cause of this phenomenon!

In a little while I had my second sight of the romantic Greek islands, this time under much more favourable conditions, for the season was high summer. Those green isles were infinitely alluring even to one on whom the arid desert had cast a spell. Rhodes, Koa, Kalymno, Patmos, Nikaria, Samos, Scio, Mitylene, Lemnos—we sailed right through ancient history and so to the more recent, more ghastly history of the Dardanelles.

There was Imbros to the north as we entered the Narrows. On the barren shore of the peninsular the gallant *River Clyde* still lay, mute testimony to a glorious occasion. Here was the place where I might have found a grave had not the 2/5th East Lancashire Regiment, the battalion in which I first served as an officer, stopped sending drafts to Gallipoli immediately I joined it.

To the southward lay the hills beyond Chanak (a place soon to become famous); the sepoy of the escort gave cries of wonderment when they saw the green

of the grass, and I thought of my Sussex Downs far away.

We crossed the sea of Marmora, and before dawn next morning we reached the Golden Horn. When the ship dropped anchor I went on deck. There followed an unforgettable experience.

I have been to many eastern ports that are fabled places of loveliness, yet none of them seemed to me to be comparable to Constantinople. No doubt the circumstances of our arrival gave me this impression, for when daylight came finally a mist lay over the still waters and hid the city. As the heat grew the vapour began to thin. Minarets stood against an opalescent background of sky, and soon the dome of Saint Sophia shyly topped the mist.

Then of a sudden the vapour went altogether, and there across the blue water lay the city in all its distant loveliness, a pearl against an opal sky.

A brown-sailed boat floated idly a cable's length away, and from it came the plaintive sound of a flute-like instrument. Noise from the city, newly awake, drifted across that lovely, lazy sea.

Some hours later lighters were towed out to us, and Turkish officials boarded the vessel. They were most polite and said that the repatriated men might disembark.

And so the long business began. At first the officials stood by the gangway and jotted down particulars of every man who disembarked, but after two or three hundred had passed them they wrote less. By the time they reached the fifth hundred they did not write at all but, instead, counted; and even this after a while was discontinued.

At length the steady flow of men ceased. I told the interpreter to ask the senior official for a receipt for the total number of repatriated men—mentioning, of

course, how many there should have been. The receipt was given; we shook hands; the official clambered down the gangway; our job was done.

I went below to make sure that the decks had been left tidy. In the sick bay I found twenty Turks! In consternation I turned on my *jemadar* (Indian officer).

"Why did you not ensure that these men were taken off?" I demanded.

"I was told they were all 'walking cases' and had gone," he answered.

One of the patients sat up.

"*Effiendi*," he said hoarsely. "You no' say anything. Let um be."

My *jemadar* had picked up a good deal of Turkish while guarding the prisoners in Belbeis. He said something to the man, and received a long and excited reply.

"He says, *Sahib*," the *jemadar* finally translated into Urdu, "that all the boots and clothes and money which we have given the prisoners will be taken from them when they reach the shore and that instead of being conveyed to their homes—most of them seem to be from Anatolia—they will have to find their way as best they can. Therefore this man begs that your honour will pretend not to have seen him and his comrades here."

"But they must go ashore," I protested.

"They know that, *huzur*," answered the *jemadar*. "The men say that if the porthole is left open they will all swim ashore when darkness comes. In that way they will avoid having their money and clothing taken from them by the authorities."

"But how can they swim ashore?" I objected.

"They're all wounded."

"Only in the buttocks, Sahib," said the *jemadar*, unsmiling.

I thought swiftly.

"Tell them," I said at length, "that if they're here at nine o'clock to-night I shall have to inform the port authorities. Meanwhile, *Jemadar sahib*, we will forget that I have made an inspection. And do you lock the door of this cabin when we leave."

The sick bay was empty at nine o'clock!

Next day I went ashore on the Pera side of the Galata Bridge. This bridge connects the Turkish city Stamboul—or, as it is called now, Istanbul—and the European quarter, Pera. The whole makes Constantinople. It is a fashionable and a presumed evidence of superior knowledge nowadays to refer to the city as Istanbul, but this is quite incorrect, inasmuch as the name applies to only one half of it.

The place was full of refugees—"white" Russians who had fled before the Bolsheviks. Several women, during my stay in the city, offered me jewels for money—for the Turkish jewellers were robbing them unmercifully, and they would not willingly dispose of their valuables to them.

Durasingham that night asked me for an advance of pay. He had, he said, seen a sporting gun which he wanted to buy. It was a bargain because our Egyptian money was worth three times as much as Turkish. I told him that under a new law it was impossible to import arms into Egypt, but he assured me airily that he would manage it, and that he would not involve me in any way. So I gave him what he wanted.

I enjoyed that stay in Constantinople. I explored Stamboul and Pera very thoroughly. I even went further afield, but of this I will not say much, for it was quite unauthorised, and even now, eighteen years

later, I still experience a sense of guilt because of it. Nevertheless I am glad that I did venture outside the military zone (Constantinople was then, of course, "occupied" by the Allies), for I was happily instrumental in saving the life of a "white" Russian baby.

Stamboul was very much like the native quarters of Cairo and Alexandria—which I knew very well—and I did not spend very much time in that part of the city. Also the inhabitants were not exactly friendly. I found Pera much more interesting. At that time it must have been the most cosmopolitan place in the world, for in addition to officers of the Allied Powers it contained representatives of most of the Balkan nations and, as I have already said, was packed with "white" Russians who had reached there from the Crimea and who, by the sale of jewellery and other possessions (auctions of these were going on continually in many of the streets), were raising money to aid them to seek asylum elsewhere. Had I brought much money with me from Egypt, I might have picked up many a bargain. All I bought, however, was a box of the most exquisite Russian cigarettes.

The transport was due to leave Constantinople at dawn on the seventh day. After a final meal, therefore, at Tokatlian's—one of the most famous hotels in the world and certainly, I suppose, the most cosmopolitan—I went on board on the final night. Then it was I learnt that before we sailed I was to "accept delivery" of a dozen so-called "political prisoners."

They were actually Bolsheviki. I have not the least notion, even now, where they came from or why the British authorities had taken charge of them. My orders were to hand them over at Chanak, the British post on the south shore of the Dardanelles, which was a few years later to become the focus-point of world

attention when Mr. Lloyd George's Government nearly engaged the country in another war.

Besides these prisoners the ship was conveying a number of passengers to Egypt—British "other ranks" on transfer, some to Chanak, some to Egypt, and an American journalist.

One of the Bolsheviks was the fattest person I think I have ever seen. When they were coming aboard and he had reached the deck, one of the "Tommies" with a remark that such a fat man was bound to float, gave him a shove so that he tumbled into the water. And sure enough he did float! The "Tommy" had to be punished, of course, and I saw that his practical joke was paid for in full.

At length we sailed.

The first night my subaltern and I shared a cabin—a separate one fitting the dignity of O.C. ship (myself) was being prepared but would not be ready till the morrow. When I entered it the subaltern was staring in consternation at his valise, which he had just opened on the floor. It contained a sporting gun.

"How the devil did that get there?" he demanded.

Association of ideas was not difficult. So this was Durasingham's method of importing a gun into Egypt! He had obviously thought that an officer's baggage would not be examined at Port Said.

I called to him. When he came I said: "Durasingham, if that gun is in the *sahib's* valise after to-morrow morning I shall put it through the porthole."

It was gone next morning, and I soon forgot all about it.

When we reached Chanak the captain hove to well out from shore while the crew fished for an anchor which had apparently been lost there on a previous voyage. It was a marvel to me that they found it.



Then we disembarked the prisoners, and finally we steamed for Egypt.

The voyage was uneventful. We docked at Port Said in due course, and I ordered all the troops on board to parade on the quay. The port authorities made a point of inspecting all new arrivals to the country—no doubt to prevent unwelcome people from landing (Egypt was still in a state of unrest)—and the Embarkation Officer went round the ranks of the men with me.

The sepoys were drawn to attention with rifles at "the order." At the end of the rear rank stood my servant, Durasingham. Although not a soldier he could easily—to a non-Indian Army officer, anyhow,—pass as one, for he wore semi-military khaki clothes. And against his left side, held in military fashion, was a sporting gun!

I prayed fervently that the Embarkation Officer did not have an observant eye. Nor had he. Though a sporting gun does not bear much resemblance to a Lee-Enfield rifle, no comment was made. What is more, when my second-in-command gave the order to "Slope Arms!" Durasingham somehow managed to bring his gun on to his shoulder without mishap, and he marched away with the others as though he had been a soldier all his life.

We reached Belbeis about five that afternoon. I discovered that my application for home-leave had been sanctioned, so back I went to Port Said the same evening! I had not booked a passage, for I did not know when my leave would be granted. In any case, when I had made inquiries about passages I had been told that it was impossible to get one, for the post-war rush "home" from the Far East and India was still at its height. I knew that I should have to "pier-

jump"—that is, to board every vessel that came into port and try to cajole a purser into finding me a corner on the ship.

In my compartment on the train was a Marine officer rejoining his ship at Port Said. He said it was leaving for England in the morning. We had our dinner together in the restaurant car and then, back in our compartment, started to "swap yarns."

When we parted at Port Said I went to the Eastern Exchange Hotel for the night. Next morning when I awoke I thought what a fool I had been not to ask the Marine for a "lift" home on his ship—such things had been done, I knew. Hurriedly I bathed and dressed and hurried down to the quay. I arrived in time to see the warship passing de Lessep's statue at the end of the breakwater. She had already put to sea.

Not with much hope I made a round of the shipping offices after breakfast. As I left one of them a man stopped me and offered to sell me a berth to Genoa in a Lloyd Triestino boat for £150. I had thought of going home via Genoa, but I certainly could not afford to pay a fare of £150.

So I went down to the quay and began my long wait.

On the second day a P. and O. liner docked. I was aboard her almost as soon as the propellers ceased to throb.

"No good," said the purser. "Not even standing room."

So it was with every passenger ship that came in. I tried British, French, Italian and Japanese boats, but they were all full to capacity.

"Why not a tramp steamer?" I asked myself. I supposed I could sign on as a cook or steward—this was at the end of the first week, when I was beginning to despair.

Next day a sorry-looking old tramp with a tremendous list to port steamed wearily up the canal. She anchored in the stream. I got a boatman to take me out. Alongside her, I hailed, but there seemed to be no one on board. But a rope-ladder hung down the side. I did not wait. Within a couple of minutes I was on deck—a deck piled up with coal.

I found the captain on the bridge.

"Impossible," he assured me when I had made my request. "We don't take passengers."

"Have a heart!" I said. "Think of yourself in my place. I haven't had a holiday since '15, and I've been in this hole a week trying to get a boat."

He grinned and relented.

"Go and see the agents," he said. "Tell 'em if they don't mind, I don't. You can have the sofa in the chartroom. But hurry. We're sailing to-night."

Hurry! No one could have hurried more than I did. I found the agents and made my request.

"All right," said the man I spoke to. "But we'll have to charge you P. and O. fare. That'll be £30."

"But I shan't even have a cabin," I protested.

"Oh, well," he said. "That's different. We'll make it £27 10s."

No use arguing. I counted out the money and hurried to the hotel for my kit. On the way, wanting to give the captain a present in recognition of his kindness, I stopped at Simon Artz and bought the most expensive box of cigars they had. Four pounds I paid for them.

Then I went aboard.

The sofa in the chartroom—a place no bigger than a suburban scullery—was not more than two feet six wide. But I did not mind. I was at last on board a ship.

"'Tisn't very comfortable, I'm afraid," said the captain when he showed me my "berth." "And there's no space for exercise. You see, we're so full of cargo—mostly copra—that we've had to put the coal on deck."

It was true. There was not a yard of space off the bridge.

We sailed at sunset. As we rounded de Lessep's statue and the fresh wind of the sea stung my nostrils, my heart began to sing. I stayed on that congested deck long after dark. The last I saw was the winking light of Damietta astern. Then I went to bed and slept the tranquil sleep of one who is homeward bound.

## CHAPTER XV

DESPITE WHAT HAPPENED towards the end I enjoyed that voyage. I am probably odd, but travelling in a liner is, to me, a very dull business. When people are confined in a ship for any length of time their worst qualities, it seems to me, come to the fore. What strange snobbishness it is, for instance, that causes eastward-bound passengers who board a liner at Tilbury or Plymouth to look with scorn on those who, a week later, embark at Marseilles! And the cliques that form after a day or two at sea! And is there anything more boring than deck games? And if you are on an India-bound boat seniority is rigidly observed—at least by officers' and officials' wives.

There was no space on my tramp steamer to move about at all. There was nothing to do except read—and I had provided myself with about twenty paper-covered Tauchnitz books (fortunately, for the ship's library consisted of *Medical Hints for Master Mariners* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). There was no one to talk to but the officers with whom I messed—the skipper, the mate, the "second," the chief engineer and "Sparks."

The captain apologised the first morning that the only liquor on board was whiskey and Guinness's stout (for seasickness?). Every morning, therefore, I "stood" him a Guinness and every night after dinner I went into his cabin and he "stood" me a whiskey (or maybe two) and played his ancient gramophone to me. He had three records for the gramophone, but I heard only one. Every night he would play "My Bonnie is Over the Ocean" three times, solemnly nodding his white head

in time and thoroughly appreciating the lilt of the song.

On the third evening he confided that this voyage was his last before his retirement.

"We've been out two years this time," he said. "Thought it was going to be longer, but I got a cargo for home at Port Swetenham."

He took a cigar from his pocket and cut an inch off the end. Then to my horror he stuffed the piece in his pipe and lighted it. So this was what he thought of my expensive box of Havanas!

Rather bitterly I said: "D'you always smoke cigars like that?"

"No," he answered. "But, you see, part of the cargo is cigars—they gave me plenty for myself; but I'm a pipe smoker, so I use 'em this way."

"So my present was like coals to Newcastle," I observed.

"It was, rather," he answered nonchalantly.

"You oughtn't to smoke them like that," I said. "They deserve better treatment."

"They're all the same in a pipe, good or bad," he replied. "It's safest to cut 'em up and smoke 'em this way."

Then he became thoughtful. "Yes," he said, "this is my last voyage. But it's damn' queer; three nights running I dreamt that I'd piled the old tub up on the beach. Sort of makes you wonder, don't it? . . . Let's have 'My Bonnie' again." And he cranked the old gramophone. "It's soothin' when you begin to think like that."

At last we reached the Straits of Gibraltar. There are two miniature whirlpools where Atlantic and Mediterranean meet. In a liner one would not notice them at all, but the tramp could manage only about

eight knots. She half turned in the first whirlpool. In the second she lurched so suddenly that the port list which she had maintained all the way from Port Said was somewhat righted.

And so up the coast of Portugal and into the Bay, in which there was a big swell, so that the ship rolled badly.

I had scarcely fallen asleep on my narrow bed the next night when the siren blared me into full wakefulness. I sat up and noticed that the beat of the engine was slower. Getting out of my blankets I went on deck. Fog!

The siren blared again just over my head. Coming suddenly, as it did, out of that eerie silence it made my nerves quiver. I looked up at the bridge. The captain was there with the mate and the helmsman. I peered over the rail. Though the ship was well down in the water I could not even see the sea.

The captain came down from the bridge. In the light from the chartroom—by the way, that light was never extinguished at night, so that I always slept in its glare—he looked very old.

"It's a bad 'un," he said. "Thick as I've ever seen it. Hope my dream don't come true!"

A Goanese boy brought hot coffee, and I had some with the skipper. It was useless to try to sleep, for the siren blared every few minutes, and the fog thrust the sound back upon the ship. Nevertheless, when the captain went back to the bridge I must have fallen into a doze, sitting on the sofa. When I awoke daylight had come. But the fog had not lessened. I went and peered over the rail again. I could just see the water and no more.

The ship crept along at half speed, the siren going incessantly. Every time I saw the captain he kept

reminding me of his dream. He was sure that something was going to happen.

"I'm particularly worried," he said, "because off Brest the French have put out a long line of buoys to act as a guide to American ships making for the harbour—Americans are bad navigators—and I'm afraid of hitting one."

In the late afternoon the fog grew even worse. Now I could not see the water at all. And suddenly I heard a siren other than ours.

There was a commotion on the bridge. The engine-room bell clanged, and the engines slowed even more.

Again the siren, this time nearer. Then ours sounded. As I leaned over the rail the nerve-racking noise seemed to bounce off the water.

And then my heart stood still. I heard the sound of engines other than ours. The bell in our crow's-nest clanged; the siren sounded. And alongside reared a great wall, as it seemed. I swear I could have touched it.

The liner slid past. . . .

I was sweating despite the clammy chill of the fog. This was worse than a trench in Flanders.

A little later on I thought I could hear another siren. I peered into the fog.

And suddenly the bell in the crow's-nest began to clang violently. My nerves thrilled. The clanging did not stop. The captain shouted. For about ten minutes this hellish din went on; then it ceased, and the clangour hung over the sea and throbbed in my ears. I heard shouting. A minute later the *serang* (Lascar bo'sun) ran on to the bridge.

When the captain came down he told me that the lookout man had gone mad.



There was much shouting and excited jabbering among the Lascars after that. The captain came back to the chartroom, mopping his forehead with a big red handkerchief and looking scared.

"What's happening?" I demanded.

"Trouble among the Lascars," he panted. "That man that went mad—scared 'em. Dunno what they'll do."

"What *can* they do?" I asked. "You don't mean—?"

"Listen to 'em," he said.

The noise was certainly ugly enough. Yet it seemed to me that the captain was unnecessarily apprehensive. No doubt his dream was preying on his mind.

"There's no *real* trouble surely?" I suggested.

"D'you mind keeping guard over those rifles?" he said.

There were half a dozen Remingtons in a stand at the side of the chartroom—put there, as the captain had told me earlier, in case of emergency, though I imagined they were not of much use, for he had said that none of the officers knew how to use them.

"Oh, come!" I said. "Surely it isn't as bad as that. Why should they——"

"It's this damned fog. It's got on their nerves. They're superstitious about it."

"But they've seen fog before," I protested.

Had he been younger and a different sort of man I should have thought that he was indulging in an elaborate "leg-pull," but he seemed perfectly serious. I told him that certainly I would look after the rifles. I had a pistol in my kit and would get it out. But I was still unconvinced that there was any possibility of trouble. True, the fog was enough to try anybody's nerves, but the Lascars were seamen, and even though one of them had been scared into insanity, that

seemed to be no reason why the others should cause trouble.

Nevertheless I had to admit that I knew nothing about Lascars. Coast Indians they were, and I supposed of Arab descent—for most sea-faring Indians are descendants of Arab immigrants—and therefore of a different kind from the high-caste Rajputs whom I had learnt to know and admire.

Fortunately, however, the weather changed soon afterwards, and my responsibility where the rifles were concerned ended. For so soon as the fog drifted away and the engines quickened their beat the Lascars became normal. What happened to the unfortunate man who had precipitated the trouble I do not know.

When the sun appeared the captain got busy with his sextant. Glumly he told me that the ship was well off her course. And indeed she was. When we turned into the English Channel we were well north of where we should have been.

Need I say that the sight of my native coast filled me with emotion? I do not think I had ever been so excited as when I saw the green hills of the Isle of Wight and thought of the Sussex Downs which I was soon to tread again.

We picked up a pilot at Dungeness, and so began the last lap of the voyage. A report that a floating mine had been sighted in the Thames estuary plunged the skipper into gloomy apprehension once more—there were still a few hours left in which his dream could be fulfilled!—, but the pilot brought us safely into the river, and just as dawn was lighting the eastern sky we were towed into dock at Tilbury.

If I remember rightly the Customs men had come aboard with the pilot at Dungeness; anyhow, my kit was certainly examined on the ship, so that when I

disembarked I was able to board a train for London at once. Within a few hours I was at my parents' house at Chelsea. My father for once in his life evidenced emotion. When he came home and found me there he bolted incontinently from the room, and when he returned his eyes were red.

My leave dated from the time of my arrival in England, so I had a full month before me.

The war had been over nearly two years, and my last memory of the country was as it had been when the rigour of restrictions was being experienced by people at home. In early February, 1918, when I had left England the best of our race were on the war-fronts, and those in England were merely "keeping the home-fires burning"—keeping the place warm, as it were, for those whom the country's business had taken overseas. Before I had been many days in England I found that those who had fought the country's battles were now in the background; those who had been left behind were largely in control. The oldsters still occupied the seats of government and controlled industry, finance, etc., but the lesser posts were filled with women and youngsters who had, owing to war conditions, prematurely come of age.

Where were the men of my generation? Many—of course—were dead, but very many were still alive. Yet there was little or no evidence of them. And the war was forgotten. "Business as usual" was the slogan, and business meant making money and making it quickly. The new England was a place of keen competition, of new ways of making money—ways opened by the power of advertisement and persuading people that luxuries were necessities.

That summer month of 1920 left an indelible mark on me. I went back two years and remembered the

comradeship, the sharing, the unselfishness of the trenches. In France we had dreamed of a better world from which, since there was enough for all, ruthless competition would be banished. We in France had even spoken of this vision, and had felt that somehow we were fighting to gain it. We who had shared a common peril in equal conditions were coming back to share a common peace—the peace that would make our labour and hardship worth while. But it seemed—in 1920—that those who had dreamed this dream had been eliminated from life altogether. At all events, they were so much in the background that they were neither seen nor heard. The “old gang” were in Parliament and in control of industry, etc., and a “new gang,” more fiercely determined to compete and to win the battle for “success,” were their underlings. The middle generation—men of my age and rather older—had disappeared.

In a week I was in deepest gloom. As I have already said, all my friends except Mark Symons—and he had disappeared—had gone. People regarded me as an oddity, a sort of Rip Van Winkle who had lost touch with life. I was a back number—and I was only 24!

Furiously as people contested in business, they were even more furious in pursuit of pleasure. The women who had preyed on soldiers during the latter war years seemed to have been joined by the majority of the young of their sex. As one of them said to me: “We want to get a kick out of life. We want speed and excitement. None of your homely joys and dull virtue for us.” Hence the new craze for cocktails. You can get drunk much more quickly on cocktails than on “straight” drinks. Hence revues, fast cars, aeroplanes, cabarets, night clubs—everything must be as fast, literally and metaphorically, as possible.

Drunkenness was no longer an occasional lapse on a man's part or something commonly seen only on Saturday nights and Bank Holidays in squalid districts. In August, 1920, I saw more women drunk than men—young women, too, of the middle and upper classes. Emancipation had gone to women's heads. They smoked far more furiously than men. They used language which one did not commonly hear even among the rank and file of a regiment. Women seemed to revel in using words that are associated with sexual functions.

God knows I was no prude. I had been drunk more than once, and I could swear like a trooper if I was roused sufficiently, but these excesses were for proper occasions, not for everyday use. Besides, there were certain words that no decent man ever used—yet girls of eighteen employed them as often as they pleased, and the egregious youths who were their alleged escorts only laughed and answered in kind.

In two weeks I was longing to be back in the desert where the air was clean and one could think. I sickened of London. It was infinitely worse than the London that I had known in my journalistic days. Then business—an evil thing, though apparently a necessity, I believed—was discreet. Now every business man was openly and blatantly a money-getter. Up till 1914 London had been as gay—and lightheartedly gay—as one could wish for. Now the seeker after pleasure lusted after the swiftest and most exaggerated excitement possible.

What a strange world I had come back to! A world that had forgotten the price that had been paid for its freedom and forgotten the survivors of the holocaust.

Long before I was due to return to Egypt, then, I was longing to be back, but I stayed till the last possible day, not knowing when I should see England again.

Indeed, to extend my leave a few days I went overland to Marseilles and joined a P. & O. there.

Egypt was still sweltering in heat when I arrived. I went straight to Belbeis—to find that meanwhile I had been promoted to captain. I gave up command of the transport and took charge of a company.

But our days in Egypt, it was apparent, were now numbered. All the prisoners-of-war were gone at last. In a short while we might expect to return to India.

Embarkation orders came in early December, and we left almost at once from Suez. As the red hills of Mokattam dropped astern I was filled with sadness. The desert had meant more to me than anything so far in my life.

Yet India lured me, for so far I had learnt very little about the country. In truth I knew very much more of Indians than of India.

We spent that Christmas at sea, and when finally, after a quiet voyage, we disembarked at Karachi, we entrained for Jhelum, in the Punjab, where the regiment's depot was.

Jhelum is a small, unimportant cantonment. The only thing about the place which impressed me was the distant view of mighty Himalayan peaks.

Within a week of our return our establishment of officers was almost doubled, for all the officers who had earlier been seconded to other regiments and jobs—such as the Burma Military Police—rejoined the regiment. There were now so many majors and senior captains (many of whom had seen no active service!) that mere junior captains like myself had to relinquish our company commands and take very much of a back seat.

This was a very serious matter for me, for by losing my company command I had to forfeit a considerable

amount of pay. I had no private income whatever, of course. So far as I could see, it would be years before I should get a company again—indeed, since there were now so many officers in the 38th Dogras it might well be that I should be posted to another regiment.

Then Fate stepped in.

At that time an immense reorganisation of the Indian Army had been ordered, the main idea being (for political reasons), it seemed, to have regiments composed of men of different religions, instead of, as in the past, each of one religion. The Second-in-Command of the 91st Punjabis (who was temporarily commanding another regiment) invited me, in the Commandant's name, to become its Adjutant, and he, indeed, personally arranged, at Delhi, where I spent several days with him, the necessary transfer. A few weeks later I journeyed down to Poona, where the 91st were stationed.

This regiment was fortunate inasmuch as a crowd of seconded senior officers had not rejoined it so soon as it returned to India on a peace footing. Indeed, when the C.O. went at once on long furlough and the Second-in-Command became acting Commandant I was next senior to him but one. And the Adjutant of a regiment, in any case, as the C.O.'s assistant, enjoys a great deal of authority whether he be senior or no.

I spent a very busy few months, for many of the old soldiers were demobilised, so that new recruits had to be obtained, and the battalion was entirely reorganised. It contained finally one company of Sikhs, one of Punjabi Mussulmans and two companies of Jats from the United Provinces. Within three months the acting Commandant departed for England on "urgent private affairs," and a man a few weeks senior to myself was left in command. But since the policy of the absent C.O. had to be carried on I was virtually responsible.

During the early part of 1921 the Duke of Connaught, who was touring India, visited Poona and District Headquarters (equivalent to Divisional Headquarters in England) ordered a grand review on the racecourse.

We were in somewhat of a dilemma, for as yet the officers possessed no horses, yet the C.O. and Second-in-Command (myself) had to be mounted. The only horses we had were the two raw-boned animals which carried the regimental Lewis guns. They had never been ridden.

It was these or nothing. I ordered one to be sent to the C.O.'s bungalow so that he could school it, and I took the other out in the desert behind Wanowrie myself. We had just one week in which to make chargers of them!

The day of the review arrived. The C.O. said he thought his mount would pass muster, and I thought likewise of mine. All went well until the general salute. The Duke with his equerries and Major-General Climo and his staff stood at the saluting base. The command was given. "Slap" went the hands of thousands of troops on their rifles, and up went my charger into the air, myself trying to control him with one hand what time I held my sword perpendicularly with the other.

Then followed as fine a display of buck-jumping as the Duke could ever have witnessed! Finally the horse shot forward at a gallop for the saluting base, I vainly trying to rein him in with one hand and striving with the other to keep my sword in position. I managed to pull him up within a few yards of the Duke, and swinging him round I galloped him back to the regiment.

Then the Duke inspected us. Was I mistaken when his face broke into a smile as he passed me?

But the ordeal was not yet over. Finally the regiments,



drawn up in two ranks, turned inwards, and with rifles pointing upwards, fired a *feu de joie*.

With a mighty bound my horse went clean into the air; then once more he galloped towards where the Duke and the General and their staffs were—no doubt he was attracted on each of the two occasions by the horses which the Royal party were riding.

But that, fortunately, was the end of the parade. I never rode that horse again.

## CHAPTER XVI

ONE EVENING WHEN I was sitting on my veranda enjoying the cool air an Indian came across the compound and salaaming deeply asked to be allowed to tell my fortune.

Remembering Ananda I asked at once: "Are you a real fortune-teller?"

"Of course, *sahib*," the man answered, not really understanding me.

I tried again. "Do you tell fortunes for money?" I asked.

"*Ji, sahib*," he replied. "If your honour will give me five rupees I will tell you your fortune."

He was obviously quite a different kind of man from Ananda—a mere charlatan. I was bored, so I gave him five rupees. I have forgotten what he told me, but it contained nothing important. When he had finished he demanded another five rupees.

"Then," he said, "I will tell your honour wonderful things."

"Go away," I commanded. "I've had enough."

He persisted so much that I called Durasingham to drive him away.

"I will tell you free," the man yelled as Durasingham was about to eject him. "You are to suffer three misfortunes in three months. You——"

But Durasingham did his duty, and I heard no more.

I offer no comments or attempts at explanation, but the three misfortunes certainly came to pass. One month later while I was inspecting stables I was bending down to examine a mule's fetlocks when somebody called

me. I turned suddenly, and a reed from the thatched roof that had collapsed the previous night penetrated my right ear and punctured the drum.

That was the first calamity, though not a very serious one.

The second happened a month later. I had a spill from my bicycle as a result of taking a corner too sharply—the gravel of the road was loose—and lacerated one hand. When I went to have it dressed in the hospital the Indian doctor told me that the soil was full of tetanus germs, and he promptly gave me an anti-tetanus injection. A week or so later I had "lockjaw."

I do not know whether this was contracted despite the injection. A British doctor, when I recovered as a result of his treatment, said that that was most unlikely. He asked me whether I had been similarly inoculated before. I said "Yes; once after I was kicked on the head by a horse in 1920, and once after I was wounded in France in 1918."

"That accounts for it, probably," he said. "The doctor who injected you ought to have asked whether you had been inoculated with anti-tetanus before."

The third calamity came exactly three weeks after I had recovered from tetanus. One day as I was walking to the regimental office a dog leapt at me from behind and seized my arm, puncturing it in two places with his teeth. Knowing the danger, I went at once to the hospital and had the wound cauterised.

Someone meanwhile had shot the dog, and the District medical officer sent its head to the Pasteur Institute at Coonoor in South India to ascertain whether the beast had been rabid.

Days went by, and I forgot all about the matter. The fact is that I was so busy with the regiment's reorganisation at the time that I had no time to think of anything else.

On the ninth day a telegram came from Coonoor. "*Positive for rabies,*" it read.

The District M.O. insisted that I go to Coonoor forthwith.

"I can't," I answered. "I'm far too busy. In any case," I said, "the wound's healed."

"That doesn't make any difference," he insisted. "You must have been infected. It takes days to reach the brain—according to the position on the body of the wound—; then it'll be all up with you."

"How many days?" I asked.

"From the forearm it should reach the brain in ten or eleven days," he said.

"In that case," I pointed out, "it's too late to do anything about it"—I did not believe that I had been infected, of course. "To-morrow is the tenth day, and it takes at least two days to get to Coonoor."

"You won't go?"

"Can't be done, old chap," I said.

But the M.O. was not to be defeated. He went to the General. The General sent me a direct order to proceed to Coonoor forthwith, and advised me to take another officer with me—"just in case of accidents," the staff officer who delivered the order said.

This drastic action broke down my disbelief. I began to worry somewhat. Rabies was terrible. It could end only in death—and death in the most horrible circumstances. I had read of people who had succumbed, barking and frothing at the mouth.

I asked our biggest officer—one Gamble, an Australian—to accompany me.

We left that night. I did not feel out of the ordinary, but the M.O. had said that the attack would be sudden if and when it did come.

Gamble knew the circumstances, of course—indeed, it was he who had shot the dog. I made him promise to help me to commit suicide with my pistol—which I had purposely brought—if the worst came to the worst. He promised solemnly.

We reached Bangalore early in the morning—and found that we should have to change and wait there all day for the next train. We went to the club.

The day was Sunday. I have never been so restless in my life as during that interminable wait. I tried to play billiards with Gamble; we explored the city; yet still I could not still my apprehension. For this, of course, was the tenth day.

At last we were on the southbound train. The weather was very hot, and this made me sleepless through that night. About noon next day we reached the foot of the Nilgiris and changed to the mountain railway.

I was feeling very hot and queer. I saw nothing of the superb scenery we passed during that long climb up the heights.

At Coonoor station there were cars for hire. Gamble got me into one and hurried me to the Pasteur Institute. I had two injections in the belly at once.

I spent the night at an hotel—there was no accommodation at the Institute. Next morning Gamble returned to Poona.

I had been given instructions to attend at the Institute daily for two injections, and I was to have 28 in all. When I went at midday the doctor in charge punctured me twice just above the places in which he had previously inoculated me and which were swollen into hard lumps.

“By the time I’ve finished with you,” he said, “you’ll have two rows of hard-boiled eggs up your tummy. Meanwhile don’t worry; you’re safe from rabies after the first two.”

India is almost a continent, and I knew but few people in it, and here was I in a strange place two days' journey from Poona. Yet that evening I was visited by a married couple living in the neighbouring Wellington. A friend in Poona had written to them about me, and they had at once called to ask me to stay with them.

So forthwith my small luggage was piled in a rickshaw, and I was put into another, and an hour or two later we reached the hospitable couple's bungalow. (I have completely forgotten their names, unfortunately.) Thence every morning I went on foot or by rickshaw across to Coonoor and had my injections.

After the heat of the plains Wellington and Coonoor were delightful places. The mountain-sides were covered with eucalyptus, wattle (*mimosa*) and pines, and the bungalow gardens blazed with flowers. The temperature was that of a July day in England, except at night when it fell nearly to freezing point.

Soon I dispensed with a rickshaw altogether and began to cover the five miles' journey across to Coonoor on foot. I found a short cut through the forest. This involved going across a slight valley in which mountain streams abounded, along a path through heavy undergrowth.

One morning I tarried by a stream to watch two landcrabs—the first I had ever seen. Suddenly the deep silence was broken by a shot. It sounded to me like a rifle shot rather than that of a sporting gun, and I wondered.

I was about to move on when I heard a sudden chattering of monkeys across the valley, and birds flew out from the trees. That someone or something had startled them was certain.

And then I remembered what I had heard at the Wellington club over-night. A panther had been seen in the neighbourhood, and men were out scouring

the forest for it. The rifle shot, the disturbance across the valley——

So excited was I that I slipped on the rock on which I stood and fell into a thorn bush. I must have let out an exclamation of pain. I was startled by the sound of a voice.

"Who's there?" it said, and added in Urdu, "*Koi hai?*"

"Englishman—officer," I shouted, for I feared that this was one of the hunters and that he might think I was the panther!

A man broke cover. He was white and carried a rifle. Behind him came an Indian carrying another.

"What the devil are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Just going across to the Pasteur Institute," I answered.

He looked at my empty hands—I was now standing up.

"Haven't you got a gun?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"You must be mad," he said, "coming this way. Why didn't you stick to the road?"

"Was it you who fired just now?" I asked, ignoring his question.

"No—someone across the valley," he answered. "We're after the panther."

"I know. It's gone along there," I said, pointing to where the monkeys and birds had revealed the panther's path. "You——"

"*Look out!*" he bawled and whipped his rifle to his shoulder. He fired.

It was a magnificent snap-shot. The great beast was dead when we reached it. Only its legs kicked.

"It's rather lucky I happened to be here," grinned my companion.

But his shaking hands belied his composure.

"That's the first panther that has been reported in these hills for years," he said. "They don't usually get as high as this."

"So I suppose it's safe for me to go across country to Coonoor, after all," I remarked, trying to appear unconcerned. "Well, I must hurry. Got to be injected, you know. Thanks for saving me from a gory death and all that. What name shall I say?"

He grinned in huge delight. "See you at the club to-night," he said. "Hop along, old chap."

Then, cupping his hands and facing across the valley, he gave a yell. Where the monkeys and the birds had been startled a man appeared. He waved his gun.

Two days later my hostess said that she proposed to take me out for a picnic in the morning.

"We'll go up to 'Lady Canning's Seat'," she said. "Lady Canning was the wife of a Governor of Madras, and she had the place made so that when she was up here in the hills she could sit there and admire the view."

We started early in a rickshaw. Dense grey clouds lay upon the mountains, so that Wellington was enveloped in thick wet mist.

"It'll clear in an hour or two," my hostess promised. "It always does."

The rickshaw boys took us by a narrow road, up and up. We passed marvellous waterpools, but our view of the magnificent scenery was restricted by the cloud-fog. Indeed, it became at last so dense that we could not see more than a couple of yards.

At length we reached an open space—or what seemed in the mist to be an open space—on which there was a seat.



"This is it," said my hostess. "We'll sit here and eat some sandwiches and wait for the clouds to roll by."

We finished our lunch and chatted idly.

"What amazes me about the Nilgiris," I said, "is the fact that, except for the coolness, one doesn't realise one is on a mountain. In fact, it's just like being at a hilly wooded place like Crowborough, in Sussex. Do you know it?"

She nodded. "The reason is, of course," she said, "that the tops of the mountains form a sort of tableland, and the peaks stick out of it just like the ordinary English hills."

"I'm rather glad it's like that," I observed. "I used to be unaffected by heights, but I had a little accident in Egypt which——"

"Tell me about it," she said.

"It happened when my regiment was encamped at the Pyramids," I narrated. "When we received orders to leave, the C.O. thought it would be a bright idea to have the regiment photographed on the Great Pyramid. D'you know the Great Pyramid?"

She did not, she said.

"Well, to give you an idea of its vastness," I went on, "it's said you can't drive a golf ball from the top so that it falls on the ground. The pyramid is so vast that it has a gravity of its own, perhaps. I don't know. Anyhow, the sides of it are great blocks of granite steps, very much worn, of course. The regiment was to be grouped on these. My company, as it happened, had to be nearly halfway up, so I was up there getting them into position. Suddenly someone above me loosened a small stone or something. It fell on to the back of my head—it was winter, and I was wearing an ordinary service cap, not a *topi*. It made me dizzy for a moment, and I became conscious that I was a long way up and that the

stone ledge was narrow, worn with age and very slippery. I looked down and—miles below it seemed—saw a sea of faces.”

I shivered at the recollection of that awful moment.

“I clung to the bare stone with my finger-nails,” I went on, “trying to prevent myself from throwing myself off the pyramid. . . . I don’t know how long it lasted, but an Arab carried me down.”

My companion was suddenly agitated. “We’d better go,” she said hurriedly. “The clouds aren’t going to clear, after all.”

“But they are clearing,” I protested. And then I gave a gasp of horror and clung desperately to the seat. The mist had rolled by suddenly. We were standing on the edge of a sheer precipice, and I looked down on to the plains of India 8,000 feet below. I could see a river, a mere thread of silver in the sun-drenched yellow of the land.

My feet tingled; my legs became numb. I closed my eyes and pulled at the seat in order to drag my nerveless body back.

Yet as a boy I had once performed the daring feat of climbing halfway up one of the huge girders that go to the top of the towers of the Albert Suspension Bridge over the Thames at Chelsea!

The last day of my stay on the Nilgiris came. I went to the Institute for the final inoculation.

“Well, that’s the lot,” said the doctor surveying the twenty-eight “hard-boiled eggs” on my belly with much satisfaction. “It wasn’t so bad, was it?”

“It wasn’t pleasant,” I answered ruefully.

“It can’t be very bad,” he said. “Why——” He chuckled. “I didn’t tell you about the Mesopotamian cases of rabies, did I?”

“No,” I said, putting on my shirt. “Go ahead!”

"When I was at the other Pasteur Institute at Kasowli, in Northern India," he began, "we got a surprising number of cases of rabid dog-bite from Mespot. They were all Tommies, and the astounding thing was they were all bitten in the backside.

I grinned. "Is this just a tale?" I asked.

"No, it's gospel," he assured me. "The coincidence was so extraordinary that I began to smell a rat. You see, what made me suspicious was that every man who underwent the treatment was given, as a matter of course, a fortnight's leave afterwards I wondered whether that had anything to do with the matter. Yet the cases were all genuine—I mean they'd all been bitten by dogs or jackals. The wounds demonstrated that.

"I communicated my suspicions to headquarters. Inquiries were made in Mespot—and the plot was discovered."

"So it was a put-up business!" I exclaimed.

"There was a certain sergeant in Mespot who was making a lot of money out of it," the doctor continued. "He'd go to a man and ask him if he'd care for a fortnight's leave in India. Of course the man jumped at the chance. 'It'll cost you a dollar,' the sergeant would say. 'Hand over the money and I'll do the rest.' And the man would pay the sergeant the five shillings, and the next time he went to the latrines and sat on the privy an Arab boy (in the pay of the sergeant, of course,) would give him a nip on the backside with the skull of a jackal. The man would howl blue murder—in genuine fright, not having been warned—and really think he'd been properly bitten. He——"

But the humour of the situation so tickled me that I burst into laughter and heard no more.

I left Coonoor that day and started the journey back. When I left the train at Bangalore I was met on the

station by a staff-officer's wife—someone had been putting in some good work behind the scenes—, who whisked me off in a car to her bungalow there to spend the night.

But I remember very little of my stay there, for I had a very high temperature. I thought I must have malaria, and hating the idea of compelling my hostess to take charge of a sick man for an indefinite period I said nothing about it.

Next morning when I boarded the train for Poona I was so ill that I could scarcely stand.

Fortunately I had a carriage to myself. I searched in my kit to see what medicines I had and found aspirin, quinine and saline. I took a large dose of saline and ten grains of aspirin and settled down to sleep. Every time I woke up I took a dose of saline—for I had a queer skin eruption which seemed to be urticaria, and thought the best thing I could do was to try to drive out the posion that might be causing it. I ate nothing at all.

Night came and with it the most intense irritation of my body. I wanted to scratch; and did. Then I caught sight of a bump on my arm that was itching.

"Good God!" I exclaimed "Bugs!"

I was certain that it was a bug-bite. The compartment must be infested.

My back seemed to be on fire. I was in pyjamas—for I had undressed for the night. I thought I would go into the adjoining lavatory and examine my back in the mirror. If I was being bitten by bugs maybe I could catch some of the loathsome beasts.

I went into the lavatory, therefore, and taking off my pyjama jacket, stood on the W.C. seat and tried to see my back. I had the shock of my life. It was covered with short weals. Not only that, but they seemed to be

alive—pulsing. It was as though great fat worms had burrowed under my skin.

I fought off panic and went back to the compartment to think things out. At all events, I consoled myself, I hadn't got bugs! I took my temperature. One hundred and three point five. More saline; more aspirin.

That was all I could do. I consoled myself with the thought that I had been in much tighter corners—whatever the disease was that assailed me—and I settled down to sleep.

I dreamt that I was being strangled. I awoke, gasping for breath. My throat was constricted, and it felt as though it were full of writhing worms.

It was inevitable that the thought of worms reminded me of the pulsing weals on my back. What had happened was obvious. The eruption—or whatever it was—was inside my throat as well as on my skin.

I must draw a veil over what followed. Suffice to say that I vomited and that I kept trying deliberately to be sick, for I found that every time I did—painful though the operation was because my stomach was empty—I could get air through my swollen throat into my lungs.

That was a night of sheer horror. I had an unknown disease which manifested itself in a loathsome and painful way. I dared not take my temperature again, for fear of what the thermometer would record. My head was aflame; I was seeing queer things; my hands were so heavy that they seemed incapable of being lifted—the sure sign of acute fever.

But the throat trouble passed, and again I slept. When I woke again dawn was breaking over the arid Indian plain. I felt a little better, but weaker than I think I had ever been.

The train was due at Poona at half-past six. I knew there would be a deputation of Indians—sepoys from

the regiment and regimental servants—to meet me. I must clean myself up and dress; I must shave.

Wearily I searched my kit for washing things and shaving material. I went into the lavatory.

The shock I had had the previous evening when I had surveyed my back was nothing to that which I had when I saw myself in the mirror. My head was monstrous; my face like one seen in a fairy-tale book. It seemed to be as round and large as a football, and the taut skin was covered with weals.

I was near "home" now and more philosophical. Medical attention was not far off. I tried to shave that bloated face. I did shave it. If my hand had been steadier I daresay I should have shaved it more closely than it had ever been shaven, for the skin was so taunt and the surface so round and hollowless that my razor glided over it.

Sure enough there was a deputation at the station to welcome me. They did not recognise me at first. Then, when they did, instead of decorating me with the garlands of jasmine they had brought, they hurried me to a horse carriage and whisked me away.

Later that day when I had received medical attention the doctor asked me: "How many inoculations of different sorts have you had the last few years?"

"God knows!" I answered. "I've been inoculated against tetanus three times, T.B., plague, cholera, small-pox and—I forget the rest."

"You've got too much in your blood," he said. "That's what the trouble is. I've never seen urticaria as bad as this."

"You should have seen it last night," I said grimly.

"Well, no more inoculations for you, my lad," he commented.

"I'll take damn' good care of it!" said I. "I don't

care if I'm bitten by twenty rabid dogs. Nothing that could happen to me could be worse than last night when I had to make myself sick in order to breathe."

That was the last of the calamities. For the remainder of the year I was hard at work training, for we had received word that we were to proceed to the Frontier in the winter. The Waziristan Campaign had been dragging on since 1919, and a new campaign was due to start in early 1922.

But before we went the regiment was provided with a little excitement.

One day a staff officer—"G.S.O. Three," his official designation was—came to see me.

"Foster," said he, "I'm going to give you a nasty job."

"Please don't," I said. "We're short-handed, as you know, and I've got all I can do as it is."

"Sorry," he said. "It's the General's orders. Have you heard of the detention camp at Belgaum?"

"Yes?"

"Well, there's a Russian woman there. Supposed to be a spy. I don't know anything about that. Anyhow, she's been there some time. Came across the Frontier, I think—she must be an Asiatic Russian, for she's a Mohammedan."

"Don't say I've got to take her back over the Frontier!" I said.

"No, your luck's out, old chap," replied G.S.O. Three. "There's a young officer up at Belgaum who's making an ass of himself over her. He's being sent down here in his own interests, and he's to be attached to your regiment."

"Thanks," I said bitterly. "D'you think we want a love-sick——?"

"General's orders," interrupted G.S.O. Three. "Shove him into the gist," he said, "and tell Foster to give him plenty to do."

Next morning G.S.O. Three rode up to my bungalow while I was dressing for early parade.

"D'you get my wire?" he asked.

"No," I said.

He cursed.

"It was to tell you that Stone" (that is not the actual name, of course) "is arriving at 6.30. I asked you to send someone to meet him because that blasted woman's travelling on the same train. She's broken out of camp." He looked at his watch and cursed again. "The train's due now."

"I'll get an officer down there right away," I said, and sent to the neighbouring bungalow for Gamble, who had a motor-cycle.

When Gamble reported I told him what had happened and packed him off at once to the station.

"If he's not there," I said, "try the hotels. Tell him he's to report to me at once."

Gamble went. He returned an hour later. He said he had found Stone with his lady in one of the hotels. Stone had refused to come. He had been melodramatic and flourished a revolver, threatening to shoot himself.

"All right, Gamble," I said. "Back you go to the hotel. Give Stone an order—tell him plainly it's an order—to return here with you at once. Say that if he doesn't obey he'll be put under arrest. Don't stand any nonsense from him. He's been sent here for his own good. Use your discretion."

An hour later Stone reported. I saw him alone.

He was about thirty, I supposed. He looked sullen and resentful; his whole attitude invited dislike.



"Stone," I said, "I'm acting under orders from the General. Your affairs are nothing to do with me, but you've been posted to this regiment in your own interests, and I've got to act accordingly. You'll find that none of our fellows will talk about the circumstances of your coming here unless you do. I'll take you along to the mess to breakfast presently and introduce you to them, and I want you to settle down in the ordinary way."

"I'm going to marry her," he said rebelliously.

"That's nothing to do with me," said I. "We're talking about the present. I'm posting you to Gamble's company—the fellow who brought you here—, and the only restriction I'm going to make is to ask you to give me your word that you won't attempt, for the time being, to go down into Poona."

"I won't give it."

"In that case," I said, "I shall have to give you an order. You don't want me to humiliate you like that, do you?"

Well, we talked in that way for some time, and eventually I made him see sense.

After a couple of days I thought he had settled down. I saw G.S.O. One on the second day, and he said that he did not know what was being done about the Russian woman. That was a matter for the civil authorities, and apparently they were up against a legal difficulty. G.S.O. One thought that the woman was still in Poona.

Well, I believed that all was now well and that in time Stone would get over his infatuation. He seemed to be quite a capable fellow in many ways.

But one day he "sent in his papers"—which is to say, he applied to resign his commission. All I could do was to despatch them to District Headquarters. But I went with them, and I saw G.S.O. One.

"What do you think of him?" he asked.

"Well, I don't like him," I said, "but I think he's quite a good officer."

"That's what his C.O. said," G.S.O. One answered. "And that's why we're trying to help him. Do you realise what's in the wind? The woman wants to marry him in order to get British nationality. Then she'll throw him over. What's he going to do then? If he's resigned his commission he'll not only have nothing to live on—he's got no money of his own, I'm told—but he won't be able to afford to get back to England. What then?"

"He'll have to 'go native', I suppose," I said.

"Exactly. Why the hell the young fool can't see what he's heading for beats me. He excites himself to such a frenzy that just to get rid of it he's willing to damn himself for good. Years of misery to pay for a few hours' satisfaction."

"A few hours?"

G.S.O. One grinned.

"Seriously, though," I said. "What are we going to do, Sir?"

"I suppose we ought to shove his papers through and let the feller go to hell if he wants to," growled G.S.O. One. "But we've got to help him. We'll hold up the papers for a bit. They'll have to go to Simla eventually, of course. I'll sit on 'em as long as I can."

Interference! The word hammered on my brain as I went back to the 91st Punjabis' lines. We were interfering in a man's life. What had the Coptic hermit said about interference? Damn the Copt! G.S.O. One was right. We couldn't let Stone ruin himself.

Days passed. Stone was more sullen than ever. I faced the probability of taking drastic action if necessary. I wished that the responsibility were not mine—that the C.O. would return. I was only twenty-five,

and I felt that I lacked sufficient experience to handle the situation.

"Don't worry, old chap," G.S.O. One said to me one day when he paid the regiment a visit. "If the situation gets too difficult we'll pack Stone off to the Frontier. A spot of active service'll cool him down."

Then Stone was reported missing. Before I could act I had to be certain that his resignation had not been sanctioned. I went to District H.Q. I learnt that his resignation had been sent to Simla and approved as from the previous day. So Stone no longer held a commission. What became of him I cannot say.

## CHAPTER XVII

IN EARLY NOVEMBER the regiment went to Waziristan. I had been suffering so acutely from the after-effects of the dysentery which I had had in Egypt in 1918—the resultant trouble was diagnosed as both colitis and tympanites (a swelling of the abdomen caused by air in the intestines, etc.)—that a medical board which examined all the regimental officers recommended that I be left behind, and the C.O. accordingly wanted me to take command of the depot.

Thus it seemed that this time I should indeed suffer the fate which I had managed to escape when the 70th Burma Rifles had been ordered to Egypt in early 1918. But the C.O. was willing to listen to my plea that I go with the regiment on active service, and so I entrained with the others, to the chagrin of the officer who was left as depot commander!

Railhead on the Frontier was Daria Khan. Thence we marched to "Wazirforce" headquarters at Dera Ismael Khan, where we officers were issued with horses. Mine was a Persian mouse-coloured brute and as vicious an animal as ever I had had. It was impossible to lead him. Of immense strength, he would strive to get away, and to prevent oneself from being damaged one either had to let him go or mount him.

Mounted he was manageable provided that one used spurs. I had never employed rowelled spurs on any horse so far—I had always removed the rowels—, but this beast was unmanageable otherwise. He had been trained in an extraordinary manner back in the land that gave him birth. Whereas the application of spurs

to any ordinary horse would ensure fast travel, it caused this brute to stop tugging at the reins, and if I dug them hard enough into his flanks he would come to a grudging stop.

It is an established practice that on long marches an officer does not ride more than he must, for foot-slogging soldiers are apt to feel aggrieved if their officers are not sharing their discomfort. Wherefore horses were led as often as not, and to ensure that my fractious beast did not bolt so soon as I dismounted I had to send him to the rear where, with other horses, he was more or less manageable.

I was acting Second-in-Command and also Adjutant when we began the long march over the Frontier into the hostile territory. We did an average of about ten miles a day through very difficult country, bivouacking each night at a fortified post. We were on our way via Jandola to Kotkai, a few miles from Sorarogha, to which point the Sappers were building a military road from Dera Ismael Khan. It was, indeed, the building of this road that was the reason for the campaign in the country.

All the fortified posts were alongside the road—actually along the caravan track, for the road was not yet built. They were between eight and twelve miles apart, and every morning at dawn each post would despatch a company or so of men in each direction along the “road” to link up with companies sent out similarly from the posts right and left of it. As each company marched to the point midway between two posts where it *liaised* (a useful verb coined in Waziristan) with the company from the next post, picquets from it were put out, on the high ground, in commanding positions on each side of the “road.” Thus all the personnel were gradually disposed of, and when *liaison*

was effected all the troops had been picqueted. The "road" between the two posts was then "open" and, guarded from hostile Mahsuds and Wazirs by the picquets, the camel convoy conveying rations, etc., and troops which had spent the night in a fortified post could pass through in comparative safety.

At sunset the "Road Protection Troops," as they were called, were withdrawn, and the "road" was then closed till morning. By Wazirforce order, no troops were allowed out of fortified posts at night.

In addition to these day picquets, however, there were permanent picquets which, supplied from regiments in the fortified posts, were relieved every week or so. These lived in stone sangars and occupied commanding positions on the hills.

We officers were in a considerable quandary, for our mess cook had absconded at the Frontier. For days we lived on curry and *chapalis* with the men, but one day we received intimation by field telegraph that the G.O.C. Wazirforce was paying the regiment a visit when it reached the next fortified post and would dine with the officers!

None of the officers' servants could cook well enough to be entrusted with the task of preparing dinner for such an occasion. The C.O. was almost frantic. Then modestly I said that I could cook—it had been a secret hobby of mine for years, though one which, as can be imagined, I had but rarely been able to practise.

The C.O. was sceptical. So were the other officers. But needs must when the devil drives. And I was mess president, anyhow, so that the decision rested with me.

I produced a four-course dinner—and was at the table to eat it with the others. The General afterwards said that it was a surprisingly elaborate meal considering that we were on active service. He envied us our cook!

We never told him that I was that person.

At the next post—after, I think, six days' marching when, laden as we were, we were beginning to feel the strain, for the way was very rough indeed—orders came for the C.O. to go on in advance in a Ford box-car (Fords were extensively used in that campaign) to assume command of the fortified post of Kotkai in the absence of a Colonel who had been appointed to temporary command of the Brigade.

That meant that I had to become acting commandant of the regiment.

There have, of course, been younger men than I was, commanding regiments, but I was not very happy because I was new to mountain warfare. Although so far we had not encountered tribesmen we were in hostile country. Many regiments marching through as we were had been subject to continual attacks and had frequently been ambushed. And mountain warfare is quite different from any other kind.

What particularly worried me was the fact that for safety's sake the platoons and companies of the regiment were well strung out in the column, which, with the baggage train of camels, was well over a mile long. Command in the circumstances, particularly since naturally we had put out an advance-guard and flank-guards and a rear-guard well behind, was by no means an easy matter. And the country was unknown so far as I was concerned.

But we got through to Kotkai without incident, and the regiment we relieved marched out the same day.

Kotkai takes its name from a Wazir village on the side of the Takhi Zam—or Tank River. The river consisted, when we arrived, of a few mere trickles down its rocky bed. Later, when it would be in spate, it would be a roaring torrent. The fortified post was on a *raghsa*,

or plateau. It consisted of huts and tents surrounded by a stone wall and barbed-wire entanglement, and it was garrisoned by ourselves, Sappers and Miners—who were building the road—, a field hospital and a contingent of mountain artillery. Behind, the hilly ground rose to an even higher plateau and across the river was a range of hills. The river forked just past the post, so that on two sides of us was a precipitous drop into the river valley. Entrance to the camp was effected up a rough road, which at night was closed with “knife-rests.”

The gist had to supply garrisons for about half a dozen permanent picquets on the heights above the river bed and, of course, the troops sent out daily to protect the road from dawn till dark.

For me life soon became monotonous, for mine was largely an office job. I would get up at about six—the season being, of course, winter, this was considerably before dawn—and having gone round the perimeter guards I would superintend the despatch of the Road Protection Troops. Then I would go to my tent-office, in which I was connected by telephone with all the permanent picquets, and the latter would keep me posted as to the progress of the road troops. When finally *liaison* was effected in each direction and the road was “open,” I would go to breakfast.

There is nothing interesting in an Adjutant's office work, and I will not attempt to describe it. Most of the day I spent in the orderly room with Indian clerks dealing with the multitude of forms which are inseparable from soldiering, even on active service. Then in the late afternoon I would supervise the withdrawal of the Road Protection Troops, mount the perimeter guards and then bath and get ready for dinner. Finally, when most of the camp were abed, I would make a final inspection of the guards.



Up there in the mountains the weather at that time of year was bitterly cold. Ice could be found on the river-bed every morning, and sometimes snow fell.

I had known loneliness, and liked it, in the desert, but Waziristan, I found, is the most desolate place on earth. The volcanic hills, multi-coloured, showed no vegetation and no sign of animal or human life. Down in the river bed a little way from the camp was a patch of onions grown in silt by unseen Wazirs; otherwise one might go many miles without seeing any greenness at all.

Sometimes, when I was waiting for the last of the withdrawing Road Protection Troops to return to camp, I would lean over the perimeter wall and gaze down that desolate river bed or across the endless hills and listen to the intense silence and wonder how it was that the stillness was even more pronounced than in the Libyan Desert.

But though we but rarely saw tribesmen, we knew that there were many in these hills and that they watched and waited unceasingly for an opportunity to attack. Their ammunition was scanty; hence they could waste none on experiments; when they shot they killed. Soft-nosed bullets fired from *jezails* struck their targets with such a devastating effect that death usually followed.

And although the post was so well guarded—by wire, and wall and many sentry posts—Mahsud thieves penetrated it again and again. Incredible though it may seem, we lost a number of camels one dark night. Thieves cut the barbed wire between two sentry posts and then dragged through the gap a cloth soaked in the urine of a she-camel. One of them then crept through to the transport lines and severed the tethering ropes of a number of camels. The noise the beasts made, blowing bubbles of skin from the sides of their mouths

(which is their pleasant way of demonstrating sexual excitement), and their grunts did not cause any suspicion, for these noises were common enough. The camels picked up the scent immediately and went soundlessly on their padded feet through the gap in the wire. The discarded cloth told its own tale to knowledgeable frontiersmen next morning.

The Mahsud is the most accomplished and daring thief in the world. In the Frontier towns, such as Peshawar, they often penetrate barracks and steal rifles from beside sleeping soldiers.

Confined to camp as I was by my Adjutant's duties, I envied the excitement that was the lot of my brother-officers. Not a day passed without there was a skirmish. Sometimes it happened during operations along the "road"; sometimes a permanent picquet would be attacked, and we would send out our mobile column—a company "stood to" all day long ready to leave camp at a moment's notice. One day, therefore, I suggested to the C.O. that I wanted some exercise badly, so he gave me a subaltern as assistant Adjutant, and occasionally thereafter I was able to go out with the troops.

The first occasion was when we received telephoned word from Brigade H.Q. at Sorarogha that a Wazir band were making across country near to us. The leader of them was a much-wanted man.

The C.O. took out the mobile column himself, and I went with him. Within three minutes of the issuing of the order the company were sprinting down the road from the camp to the river-bed, the Colonel and I in the van. Across the Takhi Zam we went and without a halt started to climb up a spur of the hill on the opposite side. And we climbed at the run, jumping from boulder to boulder like goats.

In hill operations in Waziristan a fast pace was always essential; it was doubly essential now, for no doubt scouts from the Wazir band had spotted our leaving camp and had passed word to the others.

Halfway up the hill I began to experience distress—for I was not so much accustomed as the others to such violent exercise—and my heart thumped painfully. But the Colonel had not slackened speed, and if he could keep it up, I told myself, then so must I. And at the crest of the hill we had to be ready for immediate fighting.

But this first experience was a disappointment. The Mahsuds were not in evidence. Moreover the light was fast failing, and according to Wazirforce orders, troops might not, except on major operations, be outside their perimeter camps after nightfall.

Speedy and careful withdrawal is even more important in such warfare than speedy and careful advance, for it is then that tribesmen are most apt to use their rifles. Hitherto they may have been completely unseen, so adept are they at taking cover. It is their ability and also their wonderful marksmanship and their speed of movement that make the average tribesman in his native hills equal to half a dozen Indian or British soldiers.

I have never travelled at such a breakneck speed and in such perilous circumstances—having regard to the fact that we had to leap from boulder to boulder—as I did on that occasion. I thought I should have a broken ankle, but I reached the river-bed without mishap—no doubt because I travelled too fast to think of how I should place my feet!

That hour was one of the most exhilarating I have ever spent. Almost I asked the C.O. to relieve me of my Adjutant's job altogether and let me become a

company commander, so that I might have this sort of thing every day.

A little later we had to post a new permanent picquet about a mile from the camp and build the sangar for it, and permanent picquets being anathema to tribesmen, there was sure to be trouble. When the C.O. issued orders overnight and I learnt that two companies would take part, I told my new assistant Adjutant that he would have to deputise for me in camp next day, for I wanted some more exercise outside! We had a most exciting time!

Christmas was drawing near. By this time a new Major had joined us, so that I was no longer Second-in-Command, but I was still mess president, and I planned to give the officers a really good Christmas dinner. To this end, therefore, I sent to the brewery in the Punjab—I forget now where it was—and asked them to despatch a couple of barrels of beer to us, and I got our O.C. Depot at Lahore to buy some Christmas puddings and other “goodies” and send them to us. I suggested turkeys, too, but these, he telegraphed, were not to be had.

I suddenly remembered that we had an officer on a Machine Gun Course at Belgaum—he had been sent there before we left India—and that he would be rejoining the regiment just before Christmas. I wrote to him asking him to do his utmost to buy two turkeys and bring them up with him.

But I was not in the least hopeful; indeed, no sooner had I sent the request than I forgot about it, so certain was I that it would be impossible to fulfil—for I could not recall ever having seen a turkey in India.

Two days before Christmas I was leaning over the perimeter wall in the evening watching the tail-end of the convoy come in. I was thinking of England—of

seasonable Christmas weather, snow-scenes, Christmas cards, robins, rum punch, carols, Christmas stockings. It was a long time since I had spent Christmas in its proper setting.

And suddenly I thought that I was a-dream, for down in the river-bed behind a string of laden camels, one of which bore, in panniers, two barrels (our beer, of course), was a man shepherding two large birds. He had a long pole; and the birds were fractious.

I went into the orderly room for my binoculars and focussed them on this strange sight. It was Sullivan driving two turkeys before him! And what is more, he had driven them thus for eight days, ten miles or more a day, all the way from Daria Khan!

"Good heavens!" I thought. "The poor beasts'll be as thin and as tough as shoe-leather. What a fool Sullivan was to bring them up alive!"

But they weren't. I told our mess cook—we had one by now—to kill the birds at once and hang them till Christmas near the fire.

(Sullivan said that as a result of his experience in driving those turkeys before him on that eighty-mile trek he felt sure that his hair was grey!)

But despite my elaborate preparations for Christmas I was not looking forward to the festival, for I was suffering from acute toothache. So was the C.O. But the C.O. was able to get rid of his on this second day before Christmas, for we had received word that an army dentist would be at Sorarogha at that time, and the Colonel said that he was going to him at once for treatment, and that one of us would have to remain at Kotkai, so that I could not go too.

I argued hotly about that, pointing out that I had had toothache longer than he, and that, anyhow, no one's toothache could possibly be worse than mine.

But using his seniority and authority unfairly—as I told him—he said that he was going to Sorarogha and that I should have to wait till the dentist came again.

On Christmas Eve I went to the camp hospital and begged the M.O. to pull the offending tooth out.

“It’s perfectly sound except for a little hole,” he said coldly. “It’s against my principles to extract a sound tooth. Wait till the dentist comes and have it filled.”

“I was going to invite you to dinner at our mess to-morrow,” I said, “but I’m damned if I’m going to watch you gorge on our turkeys while I can’t because you won’t pull out my tooth.”

Even that would not move him!

It was nearly a month later before the dentist came again to our part of the world—meanwhile we had had an excellent Christmas, and with the aid of various medicaments supplied by the M.O. I had been able to enjoy the dinner—, and this time I was able to visit him.

He was at a fortified post, not far away. I went down with Durasingham—did I say that he was still my faithful servant?—in a box-Ford one day when the road had been “opened.” When I reached there and was told that doctoring the offending tooth would be several days’ job I found accommodation in the padre’s hut.

The tooth at last was filled; but I was not happy. My jaw throbbed painfully. Instead of going to mess that night I took two aspirin tablets and went to bed.

Before the padre had come back from mess I awoke with a raging toothache. I could do nothing to allay it. Finally—at about eleven o’clock, I suppose—I got out of bed, pulled on a pair of long boots and donned a great-coat, and went outside to find the dentist.

Snow was falling heavily, and there was much noise, out on the hills, of rifle-fire and the explosion of bombs where, I supposed, a picquet was being attacked. But I was not interested either in snow or in rifle-fire and bombs. My tooth occupied my whole attention.

The dentist was staying at the mess of one of the British regiments. And he was as drunk as an owl—if the unlikely simile be allowed. Very thickly he said he'd be—— if he'd pull out a tooth at that time of night. But I was never more purposeful in my life. I guided him into the hut which served as his surgery, and then I put his head into a bucket of cold water. I even went so far as to dry it for him!

He was not sobered, but I trusted that his job had become second nature to him, so that he would do the right thing subconsciously. I sat down, therefore; I took his forceps and applied them to the offending tooth, and guiding his hand, bade him pull. I think I even went so far as to push him while he pulled in order that he should make a success of the job!

The tooth came out.

He was a tender-hearted man, that dentist. He burst into tears!

When I returned to Kotkai it was to find the C.O. upset by the loss of a Lewis gun and mule—the loss of any arms over the Frontier was considered so serious that a report concerning it had to be sent to Army Headquarters at Delhi or Simla, and a Court of Inquiry must be held.

It appeared that on the previous day a man of the company detailed for Road Protection duty had been taken ill, and so a substitute had to be found at the last minute. The substitute was in a quandary, for Mohammedan law prescribes that a Moslem shall wash certain parts of his body on rising every morning, and when the

substitute left with the Road Protection troops he had had no time to do this.

He was in charge of a Lewis gun mule. When the company halted along the road while a picquet was being placed on the hillside he tethered his animal to a boulder, and going to the trickle of water in the river bed, proceeded to perform his ablutions. When he returned the mule with its burden was gone!

We got in touch with the local political officer, instructing him to offer a reward for the mule and the gun, but we did not hope for results. A week later, however, a Mahsud led a mule into the camp. He said that he had found it grazing in a *nala* and that afterwards, learning that it belonged to us, he had brought it at once. No; there was no gun on the mule's back when he had found the animal, he said.

We did not believe him, of course. A Lewis gun would be indeed a prize to tribesmen. We should never see it again, we were sure. We gave the man a small reward, and off he went.

About two weeks later the Brigade Commander up at Sorarogha received an elaborately worded letter in Urdu, evidently a translation from what someone else had dictated in Pushtu, the trans-Frontier language. It read something like this:

*"Your Excellency:*

*"By chance a Lewis gun was found recently by a man of my tribe while he was peacefully tending his onions.*

*"It is a most excellent Lewis Gun of marvellous workmanship, and no doubt it is of extreme value to Your Excellency's soldiers. It is, alas, worthless to us because it eats ammunition and does not kill with every shot.*

*"Your Excellency's servant therefore begs leave to suggest that it be exchanged for five rifles."*

Qs



A Lewis gun was worth more to us than five rifles, so the dictator of that courteous note gained what he desired.

Which leads me to say that the Wazirs, Mahsuds and Pathans, who form the trans-Frontier tribes, are, for all their cruelty, ruthlessness and lawlessness, the most honourable soldiers that can be found. Hence we always respected them, even though our business was to quell them. Hence, too, the exchange of rifles and Lewis gun was made quite openly, for the Mahsud knew that we would treat him as the gentleman he is.

The warfare in Waziristan was now livening up somewhat, and the camp was heavily sniped every night from the surrounding hills. One evening after dark, as I went to the field hospital to see one of our subalterns who had been wounded, the hurricane lantern that I carried was struck by a bullet. Another humming past my ears at the same moment told me that this was not a random shot.

Thence onwards there was plenty of excitement. Because of it I began to wonder whether going up to Sorarogha, for my Higher Standard examination in Urdur, a week hence would be possible, after all.

I was rather apprehensive about that examination, for it was a difficult one. My trouble was that though I had a practical knowledge of the language probably surpassing that of most of the other officers—which means that I could talk fluently to the Indian soldiers in a way they understood—I lacked the academic style that seemed to be essential if one was to pass the examiners. No doubt the fact that my job kept me so busily occupied was responsible for that, for I had little time for study.

I voiced this fear to the *munshi* who had been teaching me Urdu—a Punjabi Mussalman. He said that I need

have no apprehension at all, for he could arrange matters satisfactorily. I asked him what he meant.

"As soon as you arrive for the examination," he explained, "you will be allotted a number. If you telephone that to me I'll pass it on to the right quarter."

He added that the examiners' reports on each officer would be forwarded from Sorarogha to Indian language officials in India—at Lahore, I think he said—and that a word from him would "do the trick."

"Of course," he added, "it will cost you something—two hundred rupees is the usual amount."

"Usual amount!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean that this sort of thing is common?"

"Nine out of ten officers in the old days 'arranged matters' in this way," he told me.

So that explained why so few senior officers could speak Hindustani intelligibly!

The *munshi* saw nothing wrong in such practice. Perhaps the fact that bribery—present-giving, as it is called—forms such an essential part of Indian life accounted for that. The average Indian, I am quite sure, regards all people in authority as being privileged to take bribes and sees no wrong in the idea of obtaining favours in that way. Back in Poona I had had ample experience of this. A *munshi* there—a different man from the one who was with the regiment at Kotkai—spent a great deal of thought in trying to find ways of bribing me indirectly in order later on to persuade me to recommend him to the authorities for an award of the O.B.E. in the Birthday Honours list! He even went so far as to question Durasingham as to my wants and to try to supply them. Once, for instance, he learnt that I wanted a new pair of riding boots, and the next day a local bootmaker came to my bungalow to measure

my feet. He said that he had been sent by the *munshi* and that payment had been arranged for.

Another time an orderly room *babu* (clerk) wanted increased pay. The day before he asked for it he brought me a magnificent brass tray loaded with fruits and nuts and begged me to accept the tray as well as its contents—which, needless to say, I did not.

But to return to that Higher Standard examination. I had learnt by this time not to try to show an Indian the error of his ways where bribing was concerned, for he would simply not understand me. (But is this strange? Although bribery in England is now forbidden by law, it is still rampant in the form of present-giving, and those who indulge in the practice see no more wrong in it than Indians commonly do.)

I did *not* pass the examination. The *munshi*, when he learnt the result, shrugged resignedly. "Your own fault, *sahib*," he said.

But I soon had something else to worry me. I developed a septic sore above my right heel which proved very troublesome. Not till long afterwards did I learn that it was caused by a tiny piece of the bomb which I had kicked from my foot during that trench raid in France in 1917 and which had spattered me with bits.

I thought that a boot was the cause of the trouble, yet there seemed to be nothing wrong with those I wore. Besides, I usually wore the leather socks and *chaplis* (sandals studded with soft iron) which Mahsuds used and which were best for rocky hill-climbing.

The sore became so painful that finally I had to discard a boot altogether and, of course, excursions outside camp were ended. I was under the M.O.'s treatment, but he seemed to be unable to cure the trouble. The wound was septic and discharging.

Every time it healed over it had to be opened and plugged to allow pus to escape.

While coping with this trouble I contracted malaria and spent an uncomfortable fortnight. On recovery I found that I could scarcely move my foot at all. My activities now were confined to office work and hobbling round the perimeter guards.

I think I must have been fretting somewhat because of inactivity, or else I was suffering from over-strain. The latter is possible, for except for one month's leave in 1920 I had had no real holiday since 1915, over six years before, and much of the intervening time had been spent on active service. Also I had been repeatedly bowled over by wounds, dysentery, accidents, tetanus, treatment for rabies and malaria and coping all the time since 1918 with the after-effects of dysentery. Anyhow, I was irritable and depressed. I thought I had better apply for furlough—I was due for it—and did so; and at last it was granted.

I made my farewell to Waziristan on the day of a real battle. It started, so far as I can remember after this lapse of time—I kept no diary of those years—with an attack on one of the permanent picquets. Either the C.O. of the regiment was already out with the Mobile Column or he went with it to the support of the picquet; anyhow, I was left behind with a mere handful of men. I went to the signallers' enclosure—a walled pit—and got in telephonic communication with the picquet. Yes; they could see the enemy all right. But the tribesmen were in force, and the Indian officer commanding the picquet expected that it would be rushed before the Mobile Column could arrive.

I got through on another telephone to the mountain artillery contingent and holding an instrument to each ear acted as liaison officer between the picquet and the guns.

The firing started. The picquet officer reported where the burst had been. I had a map on the ground in front of me, and with the aid of this—I need not give the technical details—I directed the firing. It was then, for the first time, that I experienced the phenomenon of hearing explosions twice over—once through the telephone and once through the air.

With me in the signallers' pit was an R.C. padre, who had come to Kotkai the previous day on his way up the line. He danced with excitement, so that his head kept bobbing above the wall.

I begged him to keep still lest he draw enemy fire to the pit, pointing out that if a stray bullet put me or the telephone out of action, the gunners would have to fire blindly; but he could not keep still. Finally I let fly at him in language that he could never have heard before and told him I would pitch him over the wall—and consequently over the precipice to the river bed, for the pit was on the edge of the camp—unless he kept still.

That sobered him. Afterwards, when the attack on the picquet had been beaten off, he shook me warmly by the hand and asked me to say it all again!

That afternoon I left in a box-Ford, Durasingham sitting on top of my luggage and I beside the driver with his rifle across my knees—for we went without escort, and though we travelled while the road was "open" and guarded by picquets from the Road Protection Troops, there was danger of ambush, as many a box-Ford driver had learnt previously to his cost.

That was a most exciting drive on the roughest of rough roads up and down precipitous hills at an incredible speed—for we had to cover the whole distance to railhead before dark. The heat—the hot

weather had now come—was intense, and I congratulated myself on having inadvertently timed my furlough so well. Summer in Waziristan is about the most unpleasant experience one can wish for.

And so at evening we came to the Frontier. I looked back at the forbidding hills, conscious of regret that I was leaving their desolation. I reflected that in that lonely place from which I had come the last of the Road Protection Troops would now be marching wearily into camp, and the new Adjutant would be supervising the placing of "knife-rests" across the road. Perhaps, as I had so often done, he would linger thereafter by the perimeter wall and look out across the darkling hills and listen to the silence and dream. Soon the camp would be asleep, and the only sounds to break the stillness would be from the restless camels and occasional shots in the night.

In the train I craned my head out of the compartment window. Perhaps already I was subconsciously aware that this was the last I should see of Waziristan—the most desolate country on earth.

## CHAPTER XVIII

I BOOKED A PASSAGE home on an Ellerman City liner from Karachi, but I had to wait ten days for it. Meanwhile I wanted to see Ananda again. All the way from Lahore across the Sind Desert my mind was filled with the one thought. To see Ananda was essential. I could not tell you why, but it seemed to me that something new—apart from my furlough—was about to happen, and I was experiencing a curious feeling of apprehension. But perhaps the cause of this was the fact that the wound on my foot was continuously suppurating, and my constitution was weakened accordingly. It is certain that I was not in a good state of health.

At Karachi I tried to think of Ananda dispassionately. I told myself that he was nothing to me. I knew nothing about him, but I judged, both from his name and from what my extensive reading of Indian literature told me, that he had a Buddhist background, yet I did not think he was an orthodox member of that faith. I could not doubt that he had a wonderful power—quite apart from his ability to forecast the future.

As I have said, when I had met him the second time I had been compelled to recognise that he spoke as "*one having authority*." What he had told me had, quite plainly not been a statement of mere belief, of traditional teaching which he had accepted just because it was traditional; it had sprung from knowledge and been delivered as facts. But whence had it come?

I wondered whether I should go to Bombay and try to find the man again, but it represented a long journey, and it might be quite fruitless. After all, I could by no

means be certain that I should be able to find him. My last meeting with him had seemed to be miraculous—to have been engineered in an uncanny way by Ananda, that is—, but now I was not so sure of that. It might have been mere coincidence, the sceptic in me suggested. Time has often the effect of weakening one's convictions—at least, it has with me.

Then one night I dreamt of Ananda. I saw him as a giant; he was pointing across the sea, presumably westward, and when I looked in that direction there rose from the sea a great church which opened out so that I saw its interior. At the far end was a magnificent altar, and before it stood priests in vestments. Through a mist of incense I saw the lights of six candles and a gleaming crucifix.

I looked back at Ananda. Incense seemed to wreath about him too. *He faded into it, still pointing steadily westwards.* There was a smile on his face. Just before the mist hid him from sight he spread his arms so that he represented a cross; then he brought them forward as though he blessed me; and then he disappeared.

Morning was breaking when I awoke full of my dream. That it was no ordinary dream, I was sure, for whereas most of my night-visions have always been typically chaotic, there have been several occasions in my life when they have been orderly as this had been. One such, for instance, was when I was a child and several days before the unexpected death of King Edward VII was announced I "saw" a royal funeral; another was a vision of my escape from a bad car accident which "came true" next day; another was of a newspaper "streamer" headline bearing the words "Halse Crashes" on the night before the favourite in the England-South Africa air race in 1936 came to grief—this was a prevision of the streamer headline which was used by the



*Daily Express* after the accident happened and which I saw next day.

There have been other such "visions," and always they have come when I have been in a low state of health—usually when I have been overworking.

The Freudian theory of dreams does not cover these rare examples of pre-vision, though as a student of psychology I believe that Freud's hypothesis satisfactorily accounts for most of the phenomena of the dream-world.

Well, that "vision" of Ananda had a profound effect on me. Whether it was in any sense prophetic or whether it had in itself no significance yet influenced my later doings I do not pretend to say—for in the latter connection I am prepared to admit that many of the vital steps we take in life are the result of subconscious motivation which is itself of no significance whatsoever.

The first person I spoke to on the ship when finally I embarked was a Capuchin friar, Father Albert, who was returning to England to take up duty as Provincial of his Order. I do not think that at first I invited his especial attention—except perhaps that, with my foot bandaged and encased in a large slipper, I was a casualty and had to sit about all day. Anyhow, I became very friendly with him. But we did not discuss religion—the average Roman priest never attempts to do so. Though I think of humble parentage (he came of Irish stock), Father Albert was a very cultured man, and we talked of philosophies, literature and Eastern thought.

One day he happened to refer to Indian Christians. I could not resist saying to him: "Why is it, Father, that the Indian Christian is inferior morally to the Hindu or Mussalman? But perhaps you don't agree that he is inferior?"

"Indeed I do," answered Father Albert. "I have seen it for myself, and reliable observers have told me of

it. I don't think there is any doubt that the Indian Christian is inferior to his Hindu or Moslem brother."

I was surprised, for in India I had often spoken of this matter to Anglican padres, and all of them, without exception, had indignantly denied the charge.

"Doesn't that suggest," I said gently, "that it is wrong to Christianise them?"

"On the surface it certainly seems so," admitted Father Albert; "but we are commanded by Our Lord to go and teach all nations, and so we have to obey, even though it seems futile as regards results. Besides," he added, "you must not forget that the basis of Christianity is that Christ redeems us from our sins."

That was capable of misinterpretation. I might have said that that doctrine gave Christians liberty to sin, but I was far from wanting to bait the good priest. Indeed, what he had said of obeying the command of Christ had impressed me considerably. And I could not but admire the sublime faith of this man who was not stupidly prejudiced, as those Anglican padres had been, and who admitted the seeming folly of converting Indians to the Christian religion, yet who believed that Christ had to be obeyed nevertheless.

"We cannot see," he said, "with the eyes of God. The immediate results are not necessarily the final results"—or words to that effect.

Gradually this good priest built up in my mind a new conception of Christianity. It was not subtle propaganda. I deliberately invited it, for I had become aware that Roman Catholicism was quite different from what I had imagined and that it had an intellectual background which Protestantism lacked.

Years of study and inquiry since then have shown me that Catholicism, whatever some of its exponents—and even some of its theologians—may preach, is a

most liberal creed. The *de fide* articles of belief are fewer than most people imagine, and even these are capable of interpretation. I have known Romanists who believed in reincarnation, for instance—or, shall I say? who did not disbelieve in it.

On the surface, Romanism is crude, and the average Romanist is content with a very crude interpretation. Some of the non-liturgical services and practices of Catholicism—such as, for instance, the public recitation of the iterative Rosary, the placing of written petitions on the altar before the Blessed Sacrament at Benediction, the nauseating worship of Saints' bones, bit of old cassocks and monastic habits, finger-nail parings and the like (I know one man who carries with him a phial containing reputed milk of the Virgin!)—are abominable superstitions, yet these do not, I believe, represent Romanism. Romanism at its best is to be found in the Contemplative Orders.

During that voyage home and for several months thereafter I sought the essentials of the Faith, shutting the eyes of my mind against popular interpretation. The conclusion I came to—and which many others have come to—was that, enshrined in the Roman Catholic religion and quite hidden from the majority of Romanists, including perhaps the Pope himself, is the lamp of true knowledge. I saw that lamp as having been kept alight through the centuries by a few devotees despite persecution from inside and from outside the Church. To change the metaphor, the vast husk of the Roman Church, with all its pagan crudities and its worldliness, had a tiny kernel, of the existence of which but few Catholics know. The probability is, I argued, that Hinduism—and Buddhism, which sprang from it—and some of the other Eastern cults, possess this same kernel.

This idea, of course, was Theosophical, but I was by no means a Theosophist. Theosophy, like every other cult, had its ugly husk, and as in most other cults, the leaders of the movement dwelt in the husk, not the kernel.

I was of the West, the religion of which is Christianity. To find Truth was I to re-become a Christian—in fact, to join the Roman Catholic Church? Certainly Protestantism contained no kernel. Protestantism, I considered, was simply the worship of the abominable Tyrant-God of the Old Testament, forced by His humanised Son to show love and mercy to mankind. And Protestantism was both the cause and the mainstay of materialistic commercialism. The best financiers, when not Jews, are always devout Protestants, generally of a rigid kind.

These reflections were, however, temporarily suspended soon after my arrival in England by the state of my foot. I ought, of course, to have gone to a military hospital at once, but not then knowing that the cause of the trouble was a war-wound, I went to private doctors instead. I suppose I must have consulted half a dozen. They cauterised it with hot wires and treated it in various ways, but the affliction became steadily worse.

All this time the effect on my general health was considerable. I took a cottage on Romney Marsh and went down there to live because it had been acclaimed as the healthiest place in England, and I spent my days hobbling painfully about the roads on crutches.

The last doctor I attended applied a special dressing and told me not to take it off for a week. Daily I inspected the bandage for signs of suppuration, but it remained clean. At last, I thought, the poisoning had been checked. My spirits rose.

The day came for the removal of the bandage. I sat on my bed, my foot across my knee. After months of

pain and continual suppuration from the wound this was a critical moment. What should I do, I asked myself, if the wound had merely healed over and was yet still infected? Something drastic, certainly. I could not put up any longer with this continual drain on my strength.

I took off the bandage. The wound was humpy, but it had healed over. The new flesh looked firm, though not healthily pink. Tentatively I touched it with an inquiring finger. It burst, and a putrid mess was exuded. I gazed at it in dismay—in worse than dismay.

Then I looked out of the window. Gulls were rising off the sea; tree tops danced in the brisk wind; cattle were lowing across the marsh; a plover screamed. I would have given up half my furlough to be able to tramp strongly over the windswept marsh to the hills beyond and there climb to where I could see the coastline merging into blue haze.

The doctors were able to do nothing. Why should I not take a hand myself?

In Palestine, five years earlier, a Burman doctor—a graduate of Edinburgh—had taught me much about medicine and surgery. He was not an orthodox medico. On one occasion he said to me: "What makes gunshot and bayonet wounds serious is not the hole they make so much as the germs they take into them. Isn't it true that the modern bayonet is grooved in order that it may take dirt into any wound it makes?"

I did not know; I hardly thought the designers of bayonets could have had such devilish ingenuity, I said.

"Wounds of that sort would heal much more readily if only they could be scraped clean," the doctor observed.

I thought of this as I sat on my bed with my suppurating foot on my knee. ". . . *if only they could be scraped clean.*" Why not? The wound couldn't be made worse than it was already.

But I should have to perform the operation myself. I had been to so many doctors that I despaired of finding one who would consent to take drastic action.

I had some pure carbolic acid in the house. This would have to be diluted, I knew. I used my own judgement and poured some into a cup of hot water. It should have been boiling in order to break up the globules of acid, but not having used carbolic acid before, I did not realise that.

Then I took my "cut-throat" razor, and sitting on the bed with my right foot over my left knee, I started to work. I scraped and cut down to the good flesh.

That was how I found the piece of bomb which had caused the trouble.

The wound was bleeding now, of course. I was dismayed by the hole I had made, but I felt confident of success.

The carbolic lotion was next applied. A moment later I was hopping about the room in agony. Sweat poured down my face as the acid burnt into the raw flesh.

But a month later, so successful was my operation, that I pedalled a bicycle 60 miles in six hours!

Cycling and tramping the Kent and Sussex highways and byways and regaining health daily, I let my thoughts wander whithersoever they would, but always, nevertheless, they dwelt on the one subject—the subject of my future. For some reason which I could not properly fathom I did not want to go back to India.

This was a strange matter. My record proved that I was a good soldier, and, moreover, I liked soldiering. Particularly, I enjoyed the responsibility of looking after men. And I loved India and Indians—using the word "loved" in its strict sense. As for active service, I preferred it to peace-time soldiering, and Waziristan

lured me as strongly as the Egyptian desert had done.

What were the objections, then? There weren't any. There were none at all. The truth was that I felt most strongly that I was not meant to return. The purpose of my going to India had been fulfilled, whatever that purpose was.

I was angry with my own illogicality. I told myself that if I returned I was not destined to serve so many years as a regimental officer and finally retire into obscurity on pension with a Colonel's rank. There had been suggestions that I go to the Staff College. There was no limit to what I might achieve. Had I not commanded a regiment at the remarkably early age of 25, and had I not been especially commended by the G.O.C. of the Poona District for my work in reorganising the unit?

There was not a single reason why I should not return to India, and the question of preference did not arise. Yet because I was convinced that I was "meant" not to go back I resigned my commission. I was certain that I could get my living by my pen, so there was no difficulty in that connection.

The resignation was accepted, and I received a gratuity of—if I remember rightly—£1,700 and a small pension for three years. Then it was that I remembered Ananda's prophecy regarding my "coming into" a sum of money which, though not actually very much, would seem a large sum to me.

All his prophecies, then, save one had come true—the exception was his forecast that I should become a staff officer. Yet stay; had I not been Adjutant? Is not an Adjutant a staff officer of sorts?

My next step was precipitate. I sought Father Albert and found him at a London monastery. I was received

into the Roman Church. I had resolved to seek the kernel inside the husk of Romanism. I knew now what I wanted, in fact. Physical life was bounded by death, and death ended, for the individual, all things that he might have achieved. Ambition where this world was concerned therefore was futile.

Of course, Christianity said that the nature of one's life in this world determined one's state of being in the next. I did not believe that. There was no possible justification for assuming that three score years and ten of often misdirected effort could determine the nature of a future eternity of existence. I did not believe that the earth was the scene of endless conflict between God and Devil, good and evil, and that those human beings in whom the Deity triumphed would inherit eternal life. I went into the Roman Church intending to get to the kernel and discover the meaning of life so that I could consciously shape my existence to the right end. There must be purpose in life, I argued; otherwise we must assume that God was merely amusing Himself by watching the absurd antics of His creatures. There must be purpose, and if one could conform to it—well, I could not imagine the consequence then, but I was sure that one's aim should be to ally oneself with God in order that His purpose may be fulfilled.

To earn my living I started to write. In, I think, 1924 my first novel was published. It was followed by another six months later, and I sold a short story to the *Strand Magazine* for twenty guineas—a good price for a beginner's effort. I told myself that I had no need to be apprehensive as to material circumstances. There would be ample time for study as well as for earning a living.

Alas! I could not break through the husk of Romanism. I met the crudest superstition at every turn. The cosmos of Romanism was the three-storeyed universe



of 2,000 years ago. God was the bloodthirsty old tyrant, Jehovah; Christ's mother, even His foster-father, Joseph, were powers in Heaven. To approach God one had to pay tribute first to saints (many of whom had probably never lived); if you were lucky these brought you into the august Virgin's presence, and if you could excite her to sympathy by cajoling and flattering her, she would take you into the presence of Jesus Who, in His turn, showing His pierced hands and feet and the hole in His side to His fierce and tyrannical Father, could sometimes soften the old gentleman sufficiently to cause him (he doesn't deserve a capital letter, I think) to listen to your miserable request. And even then, before you could get even into the Saints' ante-chamber and bribe them, you had to have approached them by way of Holy Church.

I was six years a Romanist. Desperately I strove against being critical. It was not my Protestant upbringing which was in revolt against Roman belief and practice, for I hated the hard narrowness, the essential ugliness and above all, the materialism of Protestantism. Romanism had what Protestantism lacked—beauty, warmth and colour—, indeed, it was that which held me to the Faith so long. I still believed that deep down in the heart of this religious system Truth struggled for existence; but I could not find it. In my search—if I may use this expression without seeming to be priggish—I even entered the Third Franciscan Order. A study of the life of Francis of Assisi suggested that he had found this Truth, and if I followed him, I told myself, I might light on it also.

But whatever esoteric knowledge the Franciscan Order may have gained originally it certainly lacked it now. Its members were, I discovered, less to be admired than secular priests. Their Rule was a poor shadow of

the original; they were ignorant, appallingly prejudiced, worldly-minded and lazy.

I investigated some of the other Orders but with much the same result. Of the many monks I had dealings with the only one who impressed me was a French member of the Carmelite Order—in Kensington, London. Here, indeed, was a monk of tradition, humble and meek and deeply spiritual—an oasis in a desert.

I penetrated the great Carthusian monastery of St. Hugh, at Cowfold, in Sussex. I did not meet many of the monks, but if they were all like the bad-tempered gentleman who was upbraiding a yokel when I arrived, they were certainly, for all their austerity, a poor lot.

The truth is, of course, that the average Romanist, monastic or secular, priest or layman, is too busy trying to save his soul by the performance of certain magical rites—for what else are prescribed “prayers,” penances, observations, etc?—to have time for seeking Truth. The Church enshrines Truth, they would say; they have it amongst them; why do they need to seek? Yet “*Who seeks his kingdom,*” says one of the beautiful apocryphal gospels, “*must never cease until he find it.*”

But I am grateful to Romanism for having put into my head the idea that Truth dwells amongst us. “*The Kingdom of Heaven is within you*” is a common enough quotation, yet few people think of looking for it in their hearts.

## CHAPTER XIX

IN THAT SIX years—a strange mental experience, I suppose, for an ex-Regular Officer and so active a man as I to have undergone—I wrote about fifteen novels, volumes of essays, a technical book and very many articles, short stories and serials, so that I do not suppose I can be accused of having altogether disregarded the material side of life. Additionally I was a reviewer and Assistant Director of the Regent Institute, the school of Journalism, etc. And pre-eminently I was a student. I was eager to explore every means of gaining the end I had in view, and I studied philosophy, psychology, metaphysics, comparative religion, science—and particularly the science of Jeans, Eddington, Rutherford and J. B. S. Haldane—and theology. I even ploughed through all the volumes of Thomas Aquinas—a formidable task.

I rarely slept more than six hours in twenty-four. The remaining eighteen I spent mostly in work and study, though afterwards, as you will see, I certainly gained other interests. But I had no time for play of any kind. I did not need it. My relaxations were tramping the countryside and fraternising in inns with simple folk from whom one can learn infinitely more than from sophisticated townspeople. One of the “generation of the lost,” I was neither content to join older folk in their memories of what they considered was a happier, saner and better organised world, nor could I share younger people’s insatiable lust for pleasure. I wanted neither the immobility of age nor the insensate speed of youth. Neither generation had found the ability to be happy;

neither had any aim but to make the most of present opportunities.

Those six years—the years 1924–1930, though the period undoubtedly began earlier—represented the period of the decline and fall of Christianity so far as Britain was concerned. Statistics prove that by 1930 the Church could legitimately claim but ten per cent—this is a liberal estimate—of the population of the 40-odd millions of inhabitants of this country. What of the remaining 36,000,000-odd? Many of them, if asked, would have said they were Christians, but they did not profess allegiance to any Church. Organised Christianity was moribund. Yet the Churches were still respected. Why? Undoubtedly because the majority of people still had a respect for religion, even though they could not subscribe to the doctrines that institutional religion taught.

I was beginning to think that there was justification for the charge that the Church in general has not kept pace with the advancement of men, that it is still in the Dark Ages, thinking in terms of Hell and Damnation. It seemed to me that men in general had a far higher conception of God in that they could not believe that He has characteristics which would disgrace a modern earthly potentate, and they could not conceive of His being bloodthirsty, vengeful and bungling, as institutional Christianity virtually suggests that He is.

But if I was thinking these things I was not consciously doing so until 1930. These were subconscious reflections which used to rise to the level of consciousness only when my intelligence was affronted by particularly bad examples of superstition—for instance, when, after midnight Mass one Christmas Eve, a priest said that a splinter of the true Cross had been lent to him and that

he proposed to let the congregation come to the altar rail and kiss it.

Sometimes, however, doubt would flood my mind as a result of much less outstanding incidents. Whenever, for example, there was a procession of the Blessed Sacrament and the Host was borne under a canopy by a priest I would devoutly kneel and worship, and all the time my head was filled with mocking voices.

But why, it may be asked, continue in such an unhappy state of mind? Why let religion torture you in that way?

The answer is that I mistrusted myself. The Church had survived 1900 years, and men with far greater intelligence and intellect than mine had been able to accept its doctrine and practice. I was not sufficient of an egoist, I think, to believe that I knew better than they. In desperation, instead of leaving the Church, I went deeper and deeper into it, seeking to submerge myself altogether—to lose my own individuality, as I believed one should try to do.

There are psychologists who would say that the motivating force was fear, but that is not true. My past life indicates that I was not afraid to die—how many times I have been near to death!—and I had not of a sudden become afraid. I had no belief whatsoever in Hell, though I was prepared to believe in a period of purifying trial immediately after death—a sort of Purgatory.

Fear was certainly not the motivating agent. The chief agent was a realisation of the complete futility of earthly life and achievement—or, at least, a belief that they were futile. If death were the end of life, life had no purpose. It was idle to help to build perfect conditions for remote descendants, for they too had to die and leave it all. And many centuries hence the earth would

cease to support life, and that would be the end of the human race. All futility.

If God existed—and it is a reasonable assumption that He does exist—and if He is sane, it is obvious that He did not create the world for nothing; it is obvious that the evolution of species has a meaning and that the fact that man has mind and vision has purpose behind it. It was logical to assume, I told myself, that we were on this earth not to qualify for Heaven or Hell (for that would mean that God was a lunatic) but in order to “grow” souls so that when we died our being had another vehicle of consciousness in which to function. Some people—the majority of people—were not “growing” souls; they were too busy seeking material power, riches, fame, ease, etc., to be able to create permanency for their own being.

And I wanted to grow a soul. I wanted to triumph over physical life, not by renouncing it, but by using it for my own purpose—for the purpose, that is, of growing a soul.

In 1930 I was beginning to realise that I was so much sunk in the Church that I was losing individuality—just as I had planned to do. My mind and my conscience were in the keeping of the Church. And neither mind nor conscience was wholeheartedly with the Church. And I suddenly discovered that instead of “growing” a soul for my continued existence, I was, in losing individuality, losing my soul and thus defeating my own purpose. Not only that, but fast losing the ability to express myself in the written word; all I could do was to express the Church.

The end of this period of my life—no doubt it was all a reaction from the earlier period between 1914 and 1922—came in 1930. I had come to a full stop. The beatific vision, I had to conclude, was not for me.

I had to conclude, too, that those Catholics who had achieved it in the dim past, had done so not because of the Church but despite it. For the Church was, I was beginning to feel, an arid desert of gross superstition and fanaticism, and the God she worshipped was a man-made creation of an age which mankind had outlived long since.

Evidently, then, I was on the threshold of a great change!

The older I become the more I realise that the most important changes in one's life are very often the result of causes apparently outside one's consciousness. History gives us examples of quite inexplicable changes. The outstanding one is that of St. Paul, of course. If we reject the story of his vision on the road to Damascus—I mean, if we believe that there was no objective vision but only a subjective creation, as it must have been—what was it that caused such a revolutionary change in him? No doubt its very causelessness made him see it as a miracle.

I see no reason why, even if one rejects the idea of miracles, one should not believe that ideas come to us direct from God. Indeed, since He is the source of all knowledge, it is evident that unless we deliberately prevent His inspiring us or are so much preoccupied with our own conceits that His inspiration is lost, we must frequently receive impressions from the Divine Mind. The thinking of God must to a large extent—if not entirely—be performed in our own minds.

This reflection is prefatory to my saying that I do not know the precise initial cause of the change in my whole outlook and life which occurred in 1930. I have tried to show its beginnings. Now I will record the actual transition.

I was tramping on the Surrey Hills when I suddenly became aware of the fact that I was idly thinking of the true meaning of sincerity—probably I was considering an article I was about to write. Few people, I soliloquised, are capable of absolute sincerity—"the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth," as the legal oath has it—for the conditions of our life make absolute sincerity impolitic. And because of this (my thoughts went on), everyone poses to some degree, even to himself.

I began to wonder to what extent I myself posed. Many people would call this morbid thinking; but I do not think it was, although certainly it is inconvenient thinking for a man who has to live gregariously. I tried to examine myself, and was not a little shocked to find that I was far from being faultless in this respect. The fact that the average man is undoubtedly nine-tenths pose did not mitigate the shock at all, for I had egotistically believed hitherto that I was not a subscriber to conventional behaviour.

Queerly enough, I began to think of Ananda. What would he say about this matter? I wondered. I pictured myself asking him the question; and his reply came instantly. "Yes," said the memory of Ananda; "you are as full of pose as other men *now*."

"Why *now*?" I asked.

"Because," he said, "you have ceased to be an individual. You subscribe to their ideas. Whenever you think, your thoughts are the outcome of the beliefs which you have accepted."

This did not seem relevant. I tried to re-concentrate on the original idea, but the memory of Ananda would not let me.

"Every man's opinion on every controversial subject—and even about his fellows—is based on his primary



belief," Ananda said. "Few men examine a subject on its own merits; they regard it through the spectacles of their mass-belief. That is why all argument is so futile. You might convince a man of the reasonableness of a contention, but he still will not accept it if it conflicts with his mass-belief. Everything that you think and do is affected by the under-layers of thought in your mind, and it is not possible for you to be sincere about anything unless those under-layers of thought—your fundamental beliefs, that is—are the result of reason."

So the argument was perfectly relevant, after all! It was to the effect that I could not be truly sincere unless my thoughts and actions were motivated by basic beliefs that were the result of reason.

What was my most fundamental belief—the belief at the very bottom of my mind? It was a belief in God. Well, that was a reasonable belief. What next? It had something to do with Christ. As a Catholic I had to believe that Christ—Jesus, that is—was, or is, God, co-equal with the Father, though the incarnated Son.

I had seated myself on a tree stump alongside the Pilgrims' Way by St. Martha's Chapel above Shere and Chilworth. I could see the top of the thin spire of the Franciscan friary down in the valley. In front of it blue wood-smoke lay on the windless air.

My mind wandered to another subject. I forced it back. Why did I subscribe to the belief that Jesus Christ was God? No; that was not really the primary question, I told myself angrily, recognising how my mind was trying to evade the direct issue. The vital question was: Did I believe that Jesus Christ was God? And coward-like, I refused to answer it. Instead, I answered the earlier one and told myself that the reason why I subscribed to a belief in Christ's divinity was that that was the teaching of the Church.

"All right," said the memory of Ananda, "think indirectly if you must. Tell me this: Why should you subscribe to that belief for such a reason?"

My mind wandered while it thought of an answer. Again and again I forced it back. The effect of all this was to appal me, for I saw for the first time both how little I could really concentrate and how uneasy and even distressed my mind became as a result of being faced with direct questions. I realised how completely dual I was. One part of me passionately wanted to get at the truth of things; the other tried to avoid answering questions which demanded definite answers. Why should my mind refuse to grapple with plain questions relative to its own honesty?

"Because," said Ananda, "it isn't honest. Like everybody else's mind, it is a welter of dishonesty. Very little of its contents—its layers of thought—have been deliberately and honestly put there; what it contains is largely the result of what you have learnt from others—in short, of mass-belief."

"But I am not infallible," I exclaimed. "I am compelled to accept the testimony of others. I was born less than forty years ago, and before that were aeons of time about which I can know nothing from direct evidence. Take Christ, for instance. The only evidence for and against Him I have is what tradition gives me."

"Let us consider that," said Ananda, "for it is a vital point. According to Christian teaching it is essential that you know and believe the tremendous idea that a certain man who lived 1900 years ago was God. You are dependent for your knowledge on tradition—and on your being fortunate enough to be born into a race of men who maintain this tradition or on your being lucky enough to receive it from a missionary and to be able to receive it. Think of the stupendous idea that belief in

the atoning sacrifice of God-made-man represents. Is it possible that God would allow it to be brought to your notice in such a way—a way fraught with uncertainty because every one of the teachers of the idea has been a sinful human being who could distort it if he so willed? If salvation can come only through belief in Christ, what about the millions of people who have never even heard of Him? Their salvation has always depended on pure and unlikely chance. If God really allows salvation to be such a haphazard matter He is plainly a monster.”

Now this was not a new argument to me, but it stunned me because of its connection with the thought that had started the original idea. How weak seemed my only answer: “It is the Church that teaches the divinity of Christ, and the Church, founded by Him, is infallible”!

“She *claims* infallibility,” was the answer. “Unfortunately she cites the Bible in support of her claim to infallibility. But she, by virtue of her infallibility, is the only guarantor that the Bible is true in this or any respect! In other words, before you can believe in the divinity of Christ—or, indeed, that He ever existed—you have to believe either that the Bible contains truth or that the Church teaches truth; and before you can legitimately believe that the Bible contains truth or that the Church’s teaching is true, you have to believe that the Church is infallible. But before you can believe that the Church is infallible you have to believe in the Bible, which she guarantees as being true, because the sole evidence of her infallibility is contained therein! What a dreadful insult to reason this is!”

I wanted to question my mind again, to ask it whether it could believe, independently of Church or Bible, in the divinity of Jesus.

"But you cannot reason in that way," Ananda protested. "If it hadn't been for the Church and the Bible you would never have heard of Jesus. You are forced to regard either the Church or the Bible as being greater than Christ, because but for them you would never have heard of Christ."

"I might have done by oral tradition," I said.

"Not in the same way. No oral tradition has ever been invested with infallibility. You believe in the divinity of Jesus because you embraced Catholicism and necessarily had to accept its belief. Thus the Church is greater than Christ."

"But I might have embraced Protestantism and denied the Church's infallibility," I pointed out.

"Had you done so you would have accepted the infallibility of the Bible," Ananda said. "That would have been illogical, for the only guarantee that the Bible is true is that of the Catholic Church which assembled the books of the Canon and which, by virtue of her claim to infallibility, pronounced them valid. In that respect every Bible-loving Protestant subscribes to the doctrine of the infallibility of the Roman Church—which in other connections he denies stoutly!"

I was silent, pondering.

"If, moreover," Ananda went on, "you believed in the divinity of Jesus because the Bible testified to it, obviously the Bible would be greater in your eyes than Jesus. So far as you positively *know*, Jesus is nothing more than a character in the Bible. . . . This is true of all characters in all books. It is true even of characters in history books. A history of England is greater than, say, Henry the Fifth, for Henry the Fifth is dead and gone, and he has no effect on the world; and but for the book he would be forgotten."

"But Jesus had an effect on the world," I pointed out.

"*Only because of the Bible*," Ananda said. "Consider this. Suppose there was no such a man in fact as Jesus but that the whole of the Gospels are the invention of a fiction-writer. Would the result, do you think, have been any different? Would not Christianity have been a world-religion just the same?"

"I cannot answer that," I pleaded.

"You can. You know perfectly well that the result would have been the same. It is the Bible which counts, not Jesus."

"But no one but a divine person could have taught as Jesus did," I protested.

"There was nothing new in His teaching," Ananda said. "Substantially it was the teaching of the Buddha, who lived centuries before Jesus. It was the teaching of some of the Greek philosophers. Why, even Seneca taught Nero the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount—not that they had much effect! The Bible happens to put forward the consensus of the wisdom of man respecting behaviour, and men's intelligence tells them that the maxims are true, even though they largely ignore them in their lives."

Again I was silent.

"The point at issue is this," Ananda continued: "It is not necessary to subscribe to the belief that Jesus is God merely in order to believe in the wisdom of His moral teaching. Unless the belief is based on reason, the belief is not acceptable; and if you subscribe to it you are insincere and therefore you are cloaking yourself with a lie. Not in that way is the Truth to be found. All the time you believe in the divinity of Jesus you are forced, if you are to be logical, to disbelieve in evolution. The idea of the divinity of Jesus stands or

falls on the central point of Christian doctrine—that the death of Christ was a propitiatory sacrifice to the Father for the sins of mankind. Isn't that so?"

"Yes."

"This argues that sin is man's fault, that, in fact, he fell from grace in the beginning. Doesn't it?"

"Of course."

"But how does that square with evolution, in which you believe? The first man was Pithecanthropus, not Adam. Far from being sinless and little lower than the angels, he was completely without the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. Man ever since has been progressing. Sin isn't his fault—I mean, the existence of sin isn't his fault. Sin is the result of his natural imperfections and his struggle for survival, and gradually, as his mind grows and he overcomes natural obstacles, his tendency to sin decreases. He does not need to be redeemed from sin since sin has resulted from the conditions in which God has placed him.

"Moreover," Ananda went on, "if you believe the idea of the vicarious Atonement you are insulting God. Would *you* require such a sacrifice before you could forgive——?"

"No!" I exclaimed, conscious that this was the really vital point.

"If you must anthropomorphise God," Ananda said, "imagine that He is at least as good as you are. For instance, what would you feel like if your children prayed to you in such terms as 'We beseech thee,' 'We implore thee,' 'We beg thee,' 'Be gracious to us'? Would you not either think them revolting sycophants or feel that they had an entirely wrong conception of your character? And supposing they ended their servile petitions with a remark that because of their faults you could not possibly love them, so they were pleading in

the name of your favourite son, whom they had murdered: wouldn't you feel mean and abased both by their belief in your feelings concerning them and by the fact that these grovelling beings were of your creation?"

But this self-examination was not as simple as that account of it suggests. My mind was against me. It rebelled continuously, and the effort of forcing it to concentrate on the question put to it exhausted me.

I had reached no conclusion when, wearily, I descended the hill and started to walk for Guildford. My head ached. I felt as though I had a high temperature. The old beliefs battled for survival with this new idea, and I was the battle-ground.

Hot and dusty and unspeakably weary, I reached Shalford and the main road. There was much traffic. Cars swept past me like images in a dream. To my heightened perception the din was terrific. To escape it I went into Shalford churchyard and sat on the step of the back porch.

Here there was peace. In a nearby garden a merry tennis-party was in progress. Rooks cawed in the ancient elms. I leant my head against the cold stone of the church.

And now, as it were, I became a third person, and I looked at the two warring factions within my mind. I saw the ache their conflict caused in my head. Was it all necessary?

Pictures came to me of early days. One persisted—that of "heathen" Indian soldiers, loyal and brave and true and honourable; men who despised the petty and the mean and whose code was the highest on earth. And from out the past, too, came the memory of a thought of years ago—that I would ten thousand times rather go to damnation with those splendid brothers of mine than to Heaven with mealy-mouthed hypocrites with whom my lot had been cast in later years, and

whose sole aim in life was, honestly or dishonestly, to make money. This was far from being braggadocio. The truth is that I realised that the Indians I was thinking of had never had a chance to become Christians. According to Christian ideas—or rather, shall I say? to strict Christian doctrine—they were damned because no missionary had chanced their way and they had believed his teaching. Yet their lives were cleaner and more noble than those of most Christians. I saw what an insult to God it was to suggest that they were heathens and doomed to a worse hereafter than Christians.

The doctrinal differences meant nothing whatsoever. Even had they not believed in God they would not be less pleasing in His sight. It seemed impossible to me that God was afflicted with the stupid human weaknesses of jealousy, resentment or pique because of non-recognition. What He required of men, I told myself, was not worship or recognition or belief but goodness, which includes fearlessness.

I was suddenly sickened of the memory of the past six years of my life and of the sham I had been. I could not possibly have believed, I felt then, all the nauseating superstition to which I had subscribed, but because of it I had grown weak and spineless and afraid of life. Instead of grasping the gift of life with both hands gladly, I had accepted the monstrous idea that I had to shun it in order to gain eternal bliss in another state of being.

I got up from the step on which I sat and metaphorically vomited all the superstition from my mind.

"Now," I told myself, "I am going to start afresh and lay a new foundation of thought—a foundation of reason."

The light began to fail. The air was chill. But when I looked into the west I saw sunrise, not sunset.

The headache was gone. I went out lightheartedly to the noisy road and tramped strongly into Guildford.



## CHAPTER XX

A FEW WEEKS later I was married. I was going to tackle life in earnest. I was going to seek the Kingdom of Heaven within myself—though I suppose that sounds rather contradictory in the circumstances!—and make something worth-while of my life while there was still time.

As a result of my marriage I became acquainted with Bishop Frederick James, whose Orders are derived from the Old Catholic Church (Church of the Netherlands) and who was a friend of my wife. He had—and still has—a church in Basil Street, Knightsbridge, London.

I must not attempt to put his teaching on paper—for he himself has steadfastly refused to do so. At first I thought that he was merely iconoclastic, a toppler-over of the ideas of superstition. Well, I thought, such a mission is well worth while, though his attitude chilled me. But despite his repudiation of the whole Christian position—the position, that is, of the institutional Church—I began to realise that he was by no means without a well-thought-out scheme of things, vague though orthodox people would say it was.

Necessarily he believed in God—I use the past tense only because I am reproducing the impressions of eight years ago. He also believed in Christ. But Christ, to him, was not to be identified with any particular man. There were many Christs, he would say. This seemed Theosophic, but it was not. He patently believed in progressive revelation, which is the idea of all real thinkers—an inescapable one, in fact—and is, indeed, to be found amongst the Modernist clergy of the

Anglican Church. The only services Bishop James conducted at his Basil Street church were an abbreviated form of the Mass, Benediction and silent meditation. He defended his Mass on the grounds that it antedates Christianity—which, of course, is in a sense true, for it is found in some form or another in almost every enlightened cult of the pre-Christian era.

There are few men who are so well read as Bishop James, and he has the advantage of having read—even Christian apologetics—with a completely open mind. His knowledge is therefore vast, and his experience of life in many capacities is such that he is able to apply his knowledge in the most useful way. And wisely he does not attempt to cast his pearls before swine. Often destructive in his church—because of his mixed congregation—he is constructive in his study.

Bishop James and I became friends. As often as I could manage it I visited him, and we would open our minds to each other in his study. He is the only man to whom I have been able to talk in halting sentences—for I am no speaker, and for many years I was too uncertain of myself to be coherent—and still be completely understood.

Though I had, as yet, by no means clarified my own position I was becoming very conscious of the fact that the nature of our communal life is based on the traditional religion of the country, and that therefore it might be fundamentally wrong. The natural facts of life are patent; the actual facts of life are vastly different. One natural fact is that there is sufficient produce of all kinds on earth to enable every man to have an abundance of what he needs to sustain life; the actual fact is that the very large majority of men live in a state of continual want and often semi-starvation, whereas a relatively few people have abundance. The reason for this state of affairs is obvious.

Those who can accumulate wealth—whether in produce or in the symbol, money—have the rest of mankind in their power and at their mercy. Originally wealth went to the strong, and the strong ruled the weak. The inheritors of this wealth need not necessarily be strong in order to sustain their position, for meanwhile laws had come into existence. The primary aim of these laws was to preserve the *status quo*. Men were taught that the rulers occupied their positions not only by divine consent but by divine ordinance.

On such a basis was the civilisation that we know formed. It is not necessarily a false basis merely because the promulgated laws post-dated the subjugation of the majority of mankind to the few. The question is whether God really did authorise this state of affairs.

The primary reason why Christianity became such an immense force was that the sentence attributed to Jesus, "*Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's*," seemed to suggest that those in authority were divinely appointed. The Romans quickly recognised that such a doctrine could subjugate far more completely than force of arms or civil edicts could do; hence the Empire took over Christianity—St. Paul's Christianity, that is—, lock, stock and barrel.

But if this doctrine were true and if no man had dared to act contrarily to it, the world would still be in a state of tyranny; slavery would still flourish, and the condition of the poor would still be tragic. All the great reforms have been carried out in direct defiance of the command implied in "*Render unto Caesar*."

Doubt assailed me. Had Jesus really said what He is alleged to have said regarding loyalty to the State? This question indicates that though I was not now prepared to regard Jesus as divine I was certainly

prepared to regard Him as a reformer. The question was, I told myself: What was the reason why the historicity of Jesus—which none could deny—had been swallowed up in myth? Why was Jesus the man lost in Jesus the legendary hero, and in what circumstances was His teaching transformed into the doctrine that we know and which is so contradictory? And why, above all, is it quite impossible for a man in modern times even to try to live according to the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount?—for if anyone did he would soon “go to the wall.”

A queer conjunction of memories—the first a mere quirk of remembrance—gave me a start. One day I made a discovery that revealed my surprising ignorance. Happening to be comparing a copy of a translation of the New Testament from the Latin Vulgate with the Authorised Edition of the New Testament, I found notes at the head of two of the Gospels to the effect that the writer of Mark was a disciple of Peter and that the writer of Luke—and consequently of The Acts—was a disciple of Paul. And I had always imagined that the Evangelists were all disciples of Jesus Himself! Why my ignorance in this respect, when the Roman Catholic version of the New Testament boldly stated the identities of those two evangelists?

I had been brought up as an Anglican and had gone to an Anglican seminary. Nobody had ever told me that the evangelists were not of “the Twelve.”

And now came the quirk of memory. I recalled an early schoolmaster's words: “Our Lord was a Nazarite, not a Nazarene. Remember that, for it is important. John the Baptist was a Nazarene, but Jesus was a Nazarite.”

I knew the difference, of course. A Nazarite was a native of Nazareth; a Nazarene was a member of a

religious sect. But why had the difference been especially stressed? What was the harm in being a Nazarene?

And then came the other memory. Somewhen just after the War, when I had learned to love the desert and had picked up sufficient Arabic to be able to talk to the wandering Bedouins whom I occasionally met, I spoke to an Arab about gipsies. I have always been interested in gipsies—the true Romanies, I mean—and I had often surmised whether, as is alleged, they were really of Egyptian origin. The Bedouin I spoke to had referred to a people whom he called *Solubbi*. I thought at first that he was referring to a tribe of Arabs and answered accordingly, but he indignantly denied that they were Arabs. "They are wandering tinkers and smiths," he said, "and we despise them, although they profess our faith."

He also referred to these people as *es-Sleb* (that is the nearest anglicised version of the name).

"They are not true *Arib*," he declared. "They are infidels at heart—as you are, *effendi*."

"You mean they are Christians?" I exclaimed.

"We call them——," and he used a word which was very near to "Nazarene." "They live on us," he said. "They are horse-doctors, tinkers and smiths, and all are craven. They do not fight. They do not use money. It is said they live as animals on animal food. You can always tell them by the mark on their foreheads."

I asked him to describe the mark—a sort of caste-mark, I took it to be. He drew it in the sand. It was the sign of the cross!

I was startled, and no wonder, for I thought I had discovered a tribe of primitive Christians.

"It is the brand of Cain," he told me casually.

(Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel are, of course,

as much figures in Mohammedan mythology as in Jewish, for Arabs and Jews, both Semites, have a common ancestry. Arabs trace the beginning of their separate race to Ishmael.)

"Cain was a smith, and so they wear the sign of the smith," he said.

An incidental thought came to me that "Smith" is a common name amongst the Romany gipsies and tinkers who wander about the English countryside.

I do not know why I soon forgot that conversation in the desert—it was in Sinai—, but I did, and the memory did not come back until the association of ideas resulting from the schoolmaster's reference to Nazarenes recalled it.

Who exactly were the Nazarenes? I asked myself. And why was it stressed that Jesus was not of their number?

Then Fate took a hand. I lighted on Dr. Eisler's *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* and other books. I read them without any idea of trying to solve the riddle; but they put me on the right track.

The wandering gipsies of the Arabian desert, of whom both Doughty in his *Arabia Deserta* and Nyberg in his *Le Monde Oriental* make reference, and the *Solubbi* or *es-Sleb* of whom the Bedouin spoke to me in Sinai, are, according to Eisler, lineal descendants of the sept of Nazarenes, Rekhabites, Qenites (that is, Cainites, or smiths) of whom both John the Baptist and Jesus were members. They were a Hebrew sept—a clan, in fact—who traced their descent through the unfortunate Zerubbabel to King David. They professed a curious faith. They were to be the restorers of the ancient Eden which, in the "*day of the Lord*," would be the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. And one of their number—one, that is, of the line of David—would be the Messiah.

In New Testament days the Jews were subject, of course, to Rome. The Messiah was the Nazarene destined to deliver them from the foreign yoke. But he was to do more than that. He was to restore the Eden conditions and so usher in "*the day of the Lord*."

Within the sept of the Nazarenes were the messianist militia, enlistment in which was performed by baptism. The sept was the secret kingdom of the new Israel. They had their own High Priest, set up in defiance of the High Priest whom the Roman conquerors had appointed. And the High Priest in Jesus's time was none other than John the Baptist.

Had not John baptised Jesus? Did not that mean, therefore, that He was enrolled in the band of those who would "*take the Kingdom of Heaven by force*"?

And He became Messiah. There had been other messiahs before him, the histories of Flavius Josephus told me, and most of them had been slaughtered by the Romans. But Jesus conceived a new idea of conquest. Not by force would he establish "*the Kingdom*." He would defeat the Romans by non-co-operation with and passive resistance to them—just as Mahatma Gandhi was to try similarly to defeat Britain in India 1900 years later.

How clear the obscure Gospels became now! For the first time the saying, "*Take up your cross and follow Me*," became clear. Of course that could not refer to the Roman gallows, since neither Jesus nor His hearers then knew that He would be hanged. The original Greek text made the meaning clear—"Assume the sign of the cross" (that is "the sign of the Qenites"); "adopt the Qenite mode of renunciation of the world, and follow Me."

And then Jesus became real to me for the first time. All the obscurities in the Gospels disappeared. With

the aid of Josephus I saw that Jesus had planned to conquer Rome by refusing tribute to Cacsar (one of the charges at His trial), and He was to do that by persuading the Jews to leave their holdings, on which they paid tax, and follow Him into the wilderness. The Holy Land would be useless to the Roman conquerors (for they had not colonised it) unless they could obtain revenue from it by taxation.

Jesus believed in the Qenite tradition of entire dependence on God for one's daily bread. "*Take no thought of the morrow,*" He taught. "God will provide. *Sell all thou hast and give to the poor, and come, follow me.*" Just as the Israelites had abandoned the fleshpots of Egypt and wandered forty years in the wilderness in order to find the Promised Land, so their descendants were called upon to do it again.

How charged with significance did that hitherto puzzling "*Render unto Caesar*" incident become now! It was a spy who tempted Jesus to betray Himself. To answer him Jesus borrowed a *denarius* from a bystander—it is significant that, because of His belief, He had no money Himself—and then made the famous remark, which clearly means: "Whosoever subscribes to the way of life that makes the use of this money necessary must pay tribute to Caesar who issues it and whose armed might protects its possessors; but whosoever claims God as his sole King and who scorns the use of Caesar's money must pay tribute to God alone. *You cannot serve God and Mammon*" (Mammon being the system of life Jesus assailed).

There is no doubt that this is the meaning of His "*Render unto Caesar*" remark, for in the indictment at His trial this was a charge against Him, and He did not refute it. But for the fact that the aim of the Pauline missionaries later on was to make the Roman Empire



the chief instrument of Christianity, the remark would never have been distorted. The result of the distortion has been that the Church always supported the state, however tyrannous it might be.

The end came quickly, for Jesus was now in danger. He announced a general exodus of the people. The Jews were to renounce their property and go out into the wilderness to find the new Promised Land.

The messianists assembled at Jerusalem on "Palm Sunday," when they staged a triumphal entry for their Leader. But the Messiah's lieutenants exceeded His commands, so that, instead of a peaceful exodus of the believers, the messianists seized the Roman guards of the Temple and proceeded to drive out the bankers and money-changers who traded therein. As Josephus records, there was a riot, as a result of which the Tower of Siloam and the Fort of Antonia were captured and garrisoned by the rebels.

Meanwhile Annas, the High Priest, sent messengers to Pilate, away in the country, and he with troops made forced marches on the capital, which he reached within a few days. Then followed a hideous massacre of the Jews; the Temple, and the Fort of Antonia were recaptured, and the Tower of Siloam was destroyed with great loss of life. The leaders of the insurrection were captured on the Thursday night and were at once tried, according to Roman law, by summary court-martial. The three leaders were found guilty. At first Pilate had been doubtful about the guilt of Jesus because, while His band had undoubtedly been in open rebellion against the Roman authority, they seemed to have acted in defiance of Him. But eventually He was convicted and hanged between His two principal lieutenants—or at least between the two principal lieutenants who had been captured, for Peter and other of the

Barjonim (extremist) disciples, who were under the immediate command of the Messiah, had fled, cowards that they were.

Later the Christians were to suggest that the Romans had hanged Jesus at the request of the Jews because the Jews were forbidden by Roman law to inflict the capital punishment. That this is nonsense is evidenced by the fact that a little later on the Jews stoned Stephen for heresy, without let or hindrance from the Romans.

Thus the political mission of Jesus failed. Certainly the messianists were not disbanded; but they were weak because they were divided among themselves. James the Just, the Lord's brother, led one faction, Peter the other. James was for continuing his dead brother's policy of passive resistance; Peter thought differently. The sympathies of the Nazarenes (which, of course, included the messianists) are not in doubt because later they elected James the Just High Priest. He was finally killed by being thrown from a pinnacle of the Temple by the Romanised clerical party of the Jews, and with Him passive resistance died—another execution, by the way, performed by the Jews without let or hindrance from the Romans.

Had the new religion of Christianity depended on the messianists this would have been the end of the matter. But a new factor was introduced. I refer to the "conversion" of Paul.

Paul was a native of Tarsus. And Tarsus had been for centuries the headquarters of the cult of Sandan and Baal, which was a variant of the cult of Adonis. Paul was certainly a Jew, and a Pharisee to boot but, a cultured man of Greek persuasion, he undoubtedly combined a belief in the myth of Adonis with traditional belief in Jehovah. There is no reason why he should not.

(For enlightenment—if it be needed—on this subject the reader is recommended to study Book I of Sir James Frazer's "Adonis, Attis and Osiris," which forms Part IV of *The Golden Bough*.)

"Adonis" is merely the Greek equivalent of the Semitic word "*Adon*," meaning "Lord" (in the Old Testament it will be found in the title "*Adonai*," one, incidentally that is given to the deified Jesus in the Roman Breviary).

"Under the names of Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis and Attis," says Frazer, "the people of Egypt and western Asia represented the yearly decay and revival of life, especially of vegetable life, which they personified as a god who annually died and rose again from the dead." It is not too much to say that this personification was a feature of almost every cult in the pre-Christian civilised world. It is impossible to estimate where it originated, but it is known that it was practised by the Sumerians at the head of the Persian Gulf in the dawn of history. It seems, indeed, if one takes the variations into account, to have been the oldest—and probably the original—religion of man. Despite their worship of Jehovah, the religion of the Israelites, strongly affected as it was by their long stay in Egypt and later in Babylon, was considerably influenced by the cult, as is evidenced by the undoubted fact that in the days of Jesus there were Temple prostitutes, part of the wages of whose hire by the priests was diverted into the Temple funds. (In one of the apocryphal gospels Jesus tells the High Priest that this money should be used for building a privy for the Temple clergy!)

Sex played a very large part in the cult of Adonis. This was perfectly natural since it was essentially the cult of reproduction. To the ancients all nature was one, nor were they, of course, wrong, for sex is essential

to all reproduction of life. They thought good harvests could be assured by their performance of magical practices; indeed, it was believed that unless these practices were performed all reproduction of animal and vegetable life would cease.

In its final forms the cult involved the birth of a semi-divine person. Sometimes he (for the earth-god was usually male) was born of a divine father and a human mother; sometimes of a divine mother and a human father; sometimes he was born of a union of two divine beings. But because the Semites believed in one God they held that Adonis was born of Him and of a human mother. Every year his birth and death and resurrection were celebrated, and one of the rites performed was that of communion through the sacramental eating and drinking of the flesh and blood of the god.

The similarity between the ancient cult in its various forms and that of Pauline Christianity was so striking that the early Christian fathers were greatly exercised to explain it. A few said that God had inspired the Greeks to intelligent anticipation, in a pagan form, of what was later to become a reality; most of them held the view, however, that the cults were the work of the Devil, who had thus led men astray.

The truth is plain. Paul was fully conversant with the cult of Adonis, and although a Jew, he was able to combine the faith of his forefathers with that of cultured Greece. It was he who was responsible for transforming the cult of Adonis into that of Christianity.

There was no Christianity until he came on the scene, nor was there a Christ. Jesus was dead, and what Jesus had taught was simply that tyranny could be conquered by passive resistance to and non-co-operation with it and that the Kingdom of God *on earth* was to be brought about by the people's forsaking all trust

in and dependence on earthly things and relying solely on the providence of God. What Paul wanted to teach was that Adonis was the man-god mediator between man and God, that his death was a propitiation for sin and that his resurrection was a promise of the ultimate resurrection of all flesh and a proof of his divinity.

It is impossible to say whether Paul really believed that the dead Jesus had in truth been the man-god whom the world of his time called Adonis—for by now the cult had developed to the state of considering that the annual celebration of the birth, death and resurrection of Adonis was that of events which had not yet happened in fact but which would happen somewhen in the future—or whether he merely used the dead Jesus as a means of giving impetus to the spread of the cult. Probably the former, for Paul was not less superstitious than most men of his day. And it must be remembered that so universal was the cult of Adonis that Hebrew thought had been immensely influenced by it; indeed, it is probable that the idea of the Messiah rose from this.

Paul announced to "the Twelve" that Jesus was not merely the man who should have liberated the Jews from the Roman domination, but was the actual Son of God in a special sense. He probably had little difficulty in persuading the simple-minded Peter and the other Barjonim that this was true, for it is plain that Jesus's conception of Himself as the son of the Father (just as every man is the son of the Father) and His other references to the relationship between God and man had puzzled them. They were very ready to deify Him and to believe, with Paul, that He would come again "*with power*".

But James the Just and his followers would have none of this. Jesus to them was the Jesus they had known; and they must continue His passive fight, and did.

Thus when the Gospels came to be written—the earliest undoubtedly by Mark, Peter's disciple—all the legendary miracles of Adonis were foisted on to Jesus. The probability is that none of the Gospels was written by actual disciples of Jesus—it is impossible to say who wrote the first and fourth Gospels. The certainty is that Paul, directly through his disciple, Luke, and indirectly through Peter's disciple, Mark, was responsible for the miracle-teaching in them. The virgin birth, the redeeming death and the glorious resurrection and also all the feats of healing, changing water into wine, casting out devils, raising the dead and the multiplication of loaves and fishes—these are from the legendary story of Adonis.

Thus Paul burnished up and improved on the cult of the ancient world, carrying it over into the new world which we inherit. But of the Gospel teaching it is not the reproduction of the old pagan cult—the miracles, that is—that moves modern people, but the wisdom of the simple teaching of Jesus. Relatively few people believe in the miracles nowadays; yet the Sermon on the Mount—the true teaching of Jesus—remains as a statement of the cardinal aspirations of man, precepts which, though believed in, no one ever really attempts to follow and which no nation as a whole could possibly follow because if it did it would encompass its own destruction, as Jesus intended that it should.

For the teaching of Jesus is fundamentally that man may have no earthly loyalties. His sole loyalty is to God.

It is this fact that, dimly realised by such clerics as the late Canon "Dick" Sheppard, causes puzzlement and distress to many a devout Christian who has been brought up to believe that Jesus commanded loyalty to Caesar as well as to God and who realises

that this cannot be squared with the doctrine of the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus denied the right of the state to exercise any dominion over individual man. The state is in His view—as it is in the view of many of the leading thinkers of to-day—merely an instrument of those who control it. Karl Marx avers that the state exists solely for the purpose of ensuring to the ruling class the continuance of its privileges. “In a feudal community,” says Aldous Huxley in *Ends and Means*, “the state is the instrument by means of which the landed nobility keeps itself in power. Under Capitalism, the state is the instrument by means of which the bourgeoisie retains its right to rule and to be rich. Similarly, under a hierarchical system of state Socialism, the state is the instrument by means of which the ruling bureaucracy defends the position to which it has climbed.”

Jesus was not fighting, though passively, against Rome. He was fighting against Mammon—that is, the state—itself. He was an anarchist in the true sense of the word. And He was utterly consistent in that He did not attempt to effect a revolution by force: His idea was to defeat the ruling caste by making it impossible for them to exercise power.

Had the Holy Land been the democratic Britain of to-day, would Jesus have taught similarly? I have no doubt of it. He would have said to the common people: “You imagine that you rule yourselves, but you don’t. You are ruled by those who *put themselves forward for election*. You do not choose your representatives. You have two or more alternatives, certainly, but though you squabble vigorously over those alternatives, it makes no difference, where you yourselves are concerned, who is elected. Whether Conservatives, Liberals or Socialists are in control the country is

ruled in the interests of the state rather than in the interests of the people.

"At the present time," He would say, "you are called upon both to build up huge armaments and to provide the man-power necessary to use them. Why? So that the state may continue to safeguard the empire against the cupidity of foreign powers. But why should you safeguard the empire in that way? Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the colonies mean nothing to you personally; they are of no value to the individual Englishman. They do not increase your personal wealth. They belong to the ruling class.—not even to the inhabitants—of each country concerned. They are useful to the British ruling class inasmuch as they are sources of income.

"And think! Canada and Australia are each as big as Europe, but neither has a population bigger than that of London! Yet they are not open to colonisation. Their owners don't want additional population unless it is likely to add to their own wealth.

"It is to defend these vast tracts of land, which are quite useless to you personally, and which their owners cannot make the most of that you are called upon both to build and maintain huge armaments and to fight should Britain—for the sake of those possessions—be attacked. Britain would not be an object of envy to foreign nations if she relinquished these useless possessions; she would be as safe from aggression as any small power.

"You are not a democracy. You have not free will. If war came you would be conscribed to fight for these possessions whether you liked it or not, You would give up your lives for them. As in the last war you would be told you were fighting for your personal liberty. *No man has ever yet had to fight for his personal liberty.*



*If any has thought that he has done so, it is only because he was not free previously."*

Without exception, all the evils—all, that is, the real sins—of the world originate in acquisitiveness. It is impossible to "*love one another*" all the time that there is competition amongst men. No competition is necessary, for there is enough and to spare for all.

How simple life would be if men would not allow themselves to be exploited for the gain of others! There would be no necessity for law. Law, in fact, provides for the defence of those who possess. It was for that reason that Jesus taught the "Higher Righteousness" based upon the simple ethic "*Love one another.*" He who truly loves could not "*take thought of the morrow,*" for to store possessions in kind or in money is to put a false value on them, and to deprive weaker people of the means of providing for *to-day's* necessities.

Our basic needs consist of food, drink, clothing and shelter. Our extra needs are for love, security and beauty. In seeking food, drink, clothing and shelter *indirectly*—by the performance of work that is of no real use to mankind—and by intense competition one with another, we entirely forgo real love and real security, and we lose all semblance of beauty.

Nature, of which we are a part, is being thrust more and more into the background. The insensate lust for gain causes men to destroy the works of God and cover the land with tawdry and shoddy dwellings, and to litter it with rubbish which, because it no longer has a "market value," is thrown away. Wherever there is spare space for a shop—the biggest curse ever adopted by the world—one is erected. Even our most treasured beauty-spots are invaded by parasitic tradesmen who realise that second only to an Englishman's love of making money is his love of his belly—they

know they can make money by selling something to eat or drink.

But idealism butters no parsnips. I believe in the idealism of Jesus, but I am a realist and I know that it is impossible to abandon my own country and go into the wilderness—indeed, there is scarcely any wilderness left! I have faith in evolution, too—it is improbable that Jesus knew anything about that. In time, I think, man will rise above his own pettiness and realise that his enemies are not his fellow-creatures of another race but the superstitions to which he subscribes and which prevent him from being free. The superstition that the state somehow has an entity is one of the worst.

It seems obvious that dictatorship of any kind is anti-Christian and evil. The best system we have been able to evolve so far is democracy, and that being so, it is obvious that it is along those lines that we must try to progress. For we must be constructive. Rebellion, whether active or passive, *unless the path to universal betterment thereby is plain*, is negative and achieves nothing for the race as a whole. And no man worthy of his soul would wish to seek happiness for himself alone.

For that reason, although I am in revolt against this hideous modern England, which is the fruit of unenlightened and self-seeking private enterprise—the lust for gain—and though I refuse to regard the state as an entity, worth respect, much less reverence, I must necessarily defend the comparative freedom which it represents.

Dictatorship, if the dictator be an enlightened man—but in that case he would not seek power!—may conceivably be a temporary blessing, but as a permanent system it must fail because there can be no

guarantee, and it is improbable, that the dictator's successor will be of a like mind.

But I am not unaware of the disadvantages of complete personal liberty. Liberty is not the right of all, and it is certainly not expedient that everyone have it. Our educational system needs to be revolutionised before it is possible for all Britons to learn how to use liberty wisely. In fact, until individual people have achieved the Higher Righteousness and entirely subjugated all personal ambition—this ambition leading to aspiration to fame, riches, honour and power at other people's expense—they have no right whatever to liberty.

What, then, is a man of my persuasion to do?

## CHAPTER XXI

IN 1933 I became a priest. This, I know, seems, in view of the trend of my ideas, to be a complete anti-climax. Yet I hope to be able to prove that it was not.

I shall not attempt to show the development of thought up to 1933—and afterwards—, for it cannot be other than uninteresting. Instead, therefore, I will try to summarise the main points of my belief, even though these may be somewhat puzzling without their genesis being explained.

Modern science has reached the conclusion that the universe is subjective both to its Creator and to man. That means that the universe is a thought-picture in the mind of God and that we men first conceive this same thought in our minds before we project it and make it an objective picture. Which is to say that our senses are not, as it were, lenses through which the phenomena of the material universe are apprehended; they project into space-time what our minds, being linked with the Creator's, subjectify. Matter does not really exist, for the atom is composed of electricity, which is not matter at all but energy. Matter is an illusion—the *maya* of Hinduism.

We cannot talk of the Mind of God, because God has no body; hence He has no parts. He is just Mind. But Mind does not exist apart from its thinking—its thoughts. Hence God exists in what He thinks. The inference regarding ourselves is obvious.

Mankind—the conscious part of creation—is the product of evolution. We have developed mind in

the course of the ages, and it is this mind that enables us to apprehend beyond the satisfaction of our biological needs. Not so an animal; an animal sees only its immediate surroundings and then only in relation to its appetites and to safety. An animal is incapable of reasoning, though it is capable of responding to the association of certain ideas and hence can be trained by man. It is also incapable of speculation—of imagination, that is.

The consciousness of man lies in his ability to paint pictures in his mind—usually by means of words. The more highly developed is the so-called creative faculty—the faculty of painting pictures—the more capable of thought is the mind. That is why the greatest thinkers have always been the greatest writers and *vice versa*.

If the universe is a picture in God's mind, we human beings are obviously part of His thoughts. And since God must obviously exist in His Own thinking, He has His being in us. "*I and my Father are one*," said Jesus, who was mystically conscious of the union of God and man. But if we are collectively the son of God, we are also man. If we are potentially good, we are also potentially evil, the reason being that we are not only part of the thought of God but ourselves have the ability to think. We, too, can create within our own limitations. What we create more readily than good is evil, because not realising that we have our being in God, we strive against one another and thereby create a breeding place for evil. And evil is the Devil—the enemy with whom God is in conflict and whom finally He must vanquish. I doubt not that this is what the originators of the idea of Satan meant, but men persisted in personifying evil and making it a creation independent of man.

When men try consciously to show forth God, they are truly the sons of God—the manifestation of God, the Christ. Some individual men—Jesus, Gautama, Confucius, Lao Tze, for instance,—have shown forth God to such purpose that they may be truly called the Christ. The manifestation of God in the world is the "*son of man*"—that is, perfect man evolved from and born of man. This, again, accords with the teaching of Jesus.

But God is not mere goodness. He is wisdom. Therefore human Christs have necessarily to be more than merely good; they have to be wise. Indeed, no man can be truly good—and by goodness I mean living the life of selfless love and fearlessness without thought of reward—who is not truly wise.

The purpose of God so far as the whole universe is concerned is plainly inscrutable to us, but it is obvious where we ourselves are concerned. It is that we are to become perfect individually and collectively, which aim, one supposes, is part of a greater one outside our ken. This means that we have to become as wise and therefore as good as we can. We cannot become truly good until we are truly wise, for without wisdom it is impossible to know in what true goodness consists. Because wisdom plays such a large part in the matter, Buddhism classes stupidity as one of the deadly sins. But stupidity in a worldly sense is not stupidity in a spiritual. From a worldly point of view wisdom lies in achievement of personal security, or even wealth, and the respect and honour of one's fellows. This is called success. But nothing fails like success. Worldly wisdom is the direct antithesis of spiritual wisdom, for spiritual wisdom prevents one from seeking security, wealth and honour and all the other achievements of the world, since none of these

things can be gained without evil effects on other men and evil effects on the self, which effects are the result of *attachment*. The son of God is compelled to have his being in himself, lest he be led to subscribe to the superstitions of the foolish; consequently no attachment or allegiance of any sort is possible. This accords with the teaching of both Jesus and Gautama the Buddha.

A man has both consciousness and subconsciousness. His subconsciousness is the effect on himself of all that he has ever done. He has never thought a single thought, said a single word or performed a single act but that his subconscious self has been affected. And all these impressions on the subconscious mind react back on the conscious. Hence habits of thought and habits of action are formed; hence, indeed, to a large extent, our very conscience, which rebels at the suggestion of change of habit. We are ruled by our habits. All our predispositions, predilections and tendencies result from the indelible impressions of previous thought on our subconsciousness.

I said that these impressions are indelible. They are indelible, however, only when they are not deliberately erased in a "spiritual" manner. The mystery of repentance is that it does wipe away ugly impressions on the subconscious mind. Repentance may never be laughed at: the tears of sincere sorrow can efface any sin.

The subconscious mind is obviously what is called the soul—the etheric body of the mind. This is the vehicle of our consciousness beyond the grave. It is the "*house not made with hands*" but with thoughts, in which we have to dwell hereafter and which will be "visible" then to all so that none of its blemishes can be hidden. No doubt the real Hell will be the inability to clothe our true selves from the eyes of our fellow

beings: respectability will be no more. We shall see one another without our trappings, just as Carlyle wished that we could see one another here. All the virtue will be gone from kings, bishops, dictators and generals and all others who are worshipped when they are naked to those whom previously they controlled or who adored them.

What a humbling thought is that of nakedness! Small wonder that the early scribe of Genesis depicted the first result of sin as being our first parent's shame that they were unclothed.

Who of our rulers in this world could dare to stand naked before his people and survive as a ruler? Carlyle's remark in this connection is a useful check on exaggerated respect for man, for when the trappings of power are removed the "divinity that doth hedge a king" is removed also.

It was thought of old that illness is the result of sin, and there are thinkers nowadays who aver that all illness is derived from injury to the etheric body. I do not profess to know, but this I know, as many doctors do, that very many illnesses apparently have their origin in the mind. My own father died of pneumonia, but as he revealed to me, it was a severe mental conflict which precipitated his illness and which left him without strength to combat it. As a priest I have practised "spiritual" healing. Two cases of suspected cancer yielded to discovery of their mental causes; a third case of illness that could not be diagnosed was due to loss of the strength of the etheric body as a result of spiritualistic practice. I have tried to investigate many illnesses, and almost invariably I have found mental causes.

The most frequent result of conflict between a man and his desires—between himself and his conscience



—seems to be his becoming subject to the germs which affect the mucous membrane—those of catarrh, bronchitis, pneumonia, etc. The truth is that these germs—as also all others—are constantly with us, but that they are harmless until injury of some sort to the etheric body causes the toxins in the blood to weaken us and make us vulnerable to assault.

The germs of the common cold, for instance, are just as much present with us in summer as in winter, but in winter depression affects the etheric body, so that it reacts back on to the physical body, and the latter becomes choked with toxins. Consequently the ever-present germs find entry. The “cold” acts as a safety valve in that it increases bodily resistance to the toxins, and they are expelled through the nasal passages and through the pores.

I have no space to deal with this matter in detail. My intention is, in any case, only to demonstrate the effect of our subconscious selves—our etheric bodies—on our physical bodies.

As thoughts of God we are obviously dependent on Him for our being. If He were to cease to *think* us, we should cease to exist. Why should He continue to think of a man who is neither interested in his Divine Origin nor interested in trying to contribute to the real purpose of life? “*The wages of sin is death.*” If a man aims solely at satisfying his physical appetites or at satisfying his base desire to acquire riches, fame, honour and the like or is “religious” only in the hope of a reward and for fear of punishment, he is destroying himself.

What happens to us when we are dead? There is no possibility of being able to answer this question with certainty. I do not profess to know; I can only say that since that which can think “*I am*” can do so

without reference to its body, it is not likely to be effected by the death of the body. Maybe we reincarnate; maybe we enter another plane of existence, but whatever be our fate this much is certain, that life is progressive. The Christian idea of all the righteous, *whatever be the state of development of their minds*, going together into a common Heaven is patently absurd. I often wonder what an intellectual such as Dr. Inge thinks of this matter. He knows that mind is a reality. He is perfectly aware that he is a more highly evolved being than, say, his cook. How could those two be happy in the same heaven? Presumably only if Dr. Inge remains Dr. Inge and the cook remains the cook!

I am far from wishing to ridicule the ideas of Dr. Inge on this subject, for I have a profound respect for him. I do not know them; but this I know, that the common idea of his Church, that God is not interested in our minds but only in our goodness, is completely untenable in view of the indisputable fact that our minds are real enough and that mind is the ultimate—and only—reality.

Life would be an utterly stupid business if knowledge and wisdom counted for nought; and evolution would be pointless if it stopped short at man and if men as vastly different as, say, Plato and a pious but utterly ignorant and superstitious American "revivalist" were destined to share equally a life hereafter.

Reincarnation offers a solution to the mystery. According to Hinduism and Buddhism, reincarnation and evolution are linked, and both are progressive, so that finally, whether we will or no, we achieve the final state of wisdom, which is complete detachment both from the world and from our very selves (a process that can be consciously accelerated by individual people). But it may be that once we have discarded

our physical bodies our further evolution is entirely on another plane or other planes. It should not be a matter of worry to us, if we can believe what is patently true—that evolution, whether of the physical or the mental (that is, the spiritual), tends always upwards. No man *of good will* can be worse off at the end of his life than he has been at any stage of it. The fact of evolution proves that there is no general retrogression.

I am not speculating. I am trying to put forward reasonable assumptions. If they are vague and general it is obviously because no man has ever returned from death—from real death, perhaps I should say, to tell us what happens beyond. And even if anyone had been revived from real death, it is highly improbable that his memory could survive the shock of re-birth.

This religion of mine—which, I think, is substantially the religion of many thinking men so far as their attitude to life demonstrate—involves a complete repudiation of accepted standards. The world of Christianity respects material achievement. So much are people interested in material exploits that newspapers find it necessary to publish even the contents of the wills of dead men of previous “substance” or fame or notoriety. There have been more biographies of Napoleon than biographies of any other man, yet Napoleon was inspired solely by personal ambition. Dictators are worshipped in their own countries and feared in others, yet wise men such as Sir Francis Bacon have recognised their insensate folly. I am quite certain that you will never find a Napoleon, a Hitler, or a Mussolini on the other side of the grave—“*verily, they have their reward*” already.

To aspire to power, honour or riches is plainly unutterable folly, since it all has to be relinquished

at death. But is the man who *merely* works for his living any different? He differs only in respect of his lack of opportunity or his lack of personality. To live merely to earn the wherewithal to live is but to dig holes in order to fill others. And indulgence in pleasure obviously does not invest such a life with meaning. We are not here primarily to earn our living; that would be purposeless. We are here to further the purpose of our Creator—to strive for the three cardinal ideals, love, beauty, and truth, which are, in reality, one. Plainly, none of these can be striven for all the while we are thinking of ourselves.

But there is a spiritual side to this religion as well. God is my Originator. I am in His Mind. Therefore, there is a link between Him and me, an umbilical cord, as it were, which constitutes my sole source of life. I cannot break that cord and live beyond the years of my physical existence.

It is obvious that there can be communication between the Divine Thinker and the thought—between God and myself. “Inspiration” is not a myth.

All the great religions of the world have recognised that union with God—that is, making the individual mind a receptacle of knowledge direct from God—can be achieved by what the Catholic Church calls meditation and what is more vulgarly termed mysticism. Those religious systems which encourage the practice of mysticism make it a so-called spiritual exercise and hedge it about with rules and formulae and often with bodily deprivation. This is especially true of the Catholic Church. In every religious Order of the Church meditation is practised regularly, and it is always preceded by laborious preparation which includes the focusing of the mind on an event in the life of Jesus or of one of the saints. The result is that the mind thereafter

is obsessed by the scaffolding and cannot penetrate further.

Jesus practised meditation. He did so without aid and apparently without laborious preparation. And it is significant that when He did so He ignored the Temple and the synagogues and, instead, went outside the city to the Mount of Olives. Not only is this an indication that He refused to look for God boxed up or especially present in a "sacred" building—all His praying, as well as His meditation, was conducted outdoors—but that He recognised the necessity for getting away from the artificialities of man's invention and becoming, for the time being, one with nature.

To seek God one must unite with His Own creation and find Him in that. Unconscious nature knows no sin. It is we who see evil in nature—the evil that I once saw myself. There is no ill in storm and tempest, in flood or ice, in mist and rain, in barren desert and desolate hills. It is we who see ill in these things because we are afraid of them. No animal or bird—other than domesticated animals and birds—is afraid of nature in any of her aspects or moods. Even domesticated animals are much less afraid of her than is man. Cattle, which love heat, will nevertheless be unaffected by a night spent out of doors during severe frost. The humble domesticated fowl will as readily roost in a tree as in its hen-house, and generating extra heat when it does so, will be quite unaffected by cold except of the severest type.

Not only that, but animals which succumb—as occasionally happens—to weather extremes do not appear to suffer pain. The reason is that they have no fear of death, as we have. Of course, this is due to lack of imagination, one would say, but still more is it due to the inability to be self-pitiful, "*attached*."

All nature is a unity. Man, by divorcing himself from it, cuts himself off from a harmony which is essential to him both physically and spiritually. The further he gets away from nature the more must he get out of touch with God. The average man never sees a sunrise or sunset; he never looks at the stars. He reads about these things, even sees pictures of them and sentimentalises on them, but he does not know them. Not for him is union with the Creator of all the immensity of nature. The universe is the Mind—that is to say, the thinking—of God. To look into the depths of the firmament is to look, therefore, into the Divine Mind.

But one can do more than that. Rapt in contemplation of the silent stars one can project oneself into the great stillness. One does not need to draw fanciful pictures. To know the facts—to realise that the earth is part of the relatively miniature solar system and that the solar system is part of the Galactic System, a “star city” revolving like a cartwheel in space; that when one looks at the Milky Way one is observing the suburbs of our own star city; that beyond the confines of the Milky Way are a myriad other star cities, some of which can be seen, and each of which is as big as our Galactic System; that all this visible firmament is but the surface of a sphere and that if one were able to travel over that surface one would, like light, eventually return to the earth from the opposite direction; and to know, too, that at the other end of the scale, in the atom and the molecule, too tiny for even the penetration of a microscope, there are exactly similar systems—all this is to cause one to realise that the cosmos is a system of universes within universes, from the atom to the whole, and that even as each universe revolves round its nucleus or central point, so must

the entire cosmos revolve round a supreme central point. This is not frightening. The mind that can apprehend these things is necessarily greater than that which is apprehended, for these things are all in the mind first and then objectified through the senses.

Every morning I go out on to a height of land—before the dawn, most of the months of the year—and try to link myself with nature. In the winter I watch the coming of the dawn across the hills, and the marvel of this daily phenomenon never grows less. This is the most magnificent sight that man can have. Apart from its beauty, it enthrals one because of its significance. Yet, as I have said, there are men who have never really seen the coming of dawn!

It is there, on my height of land, watching the curtain of night recede and the stars paling, that I can best meditate. Then it is that I know that my mind, though pitifully uncreative, is the reflection of the Divine Mind and that I can see the fading darkness, the stars and the rising sun only because these things are happening in my mind and then being projected into apparently illimitable space-time—into the *continuum* that is the consciousness of God. One cannot see into one's own mind unless one undergoes such experiences.

It is at such times that real prayer is possible—not the prayer which basely asks for those things that God in His wisdom either gives voluntarily or withholds; not the prayer which is evidence of a complete lack of real faith and trust in God; but the aspiration for knowledge and for that unity with God that enables one to realise the pettiness and futility of personal ambition.

Such communion makes me infinitely content. Why should I be sorrowful and worried and fearful when

the evolutionary progress of the cosmos ensures the working out of God's purpose? I am not a mere cog in a gigantic machine; neither am I an accident of circumstance. The mind is immortal; it cannot cease to be so long as "*I am*" is understood to be "*I am becoming*." Time and space are nothing; they are but relative to my own present disabilities and imperfections. I had no beginning; I can have no ending, the reason being that of "*I am*" it is not "*I*" which matters, but "*am*." I am a conception of God, and what is conceived cannot be un-conceived *so long as it is conscious of itself*. This is the mystery of unity between the Divine Mind and the human; for the human mind is the reflection of the Divine and the reflection must necessarily be as permanent as the original *so long as it wills itself to be the reflector*.

We are, then, the Christ; and because of that I am a Christian, realising that the aim of humanity must be so faithfully to reflect God that we, man and "*son of man*," are ultimately one with God. We have, therefore, a common mission—to build the kingdom of Heaven, the habitation of God, on earth. When we have done that, maybe the necessity for matter will have passed away and the spiritual Heaven will evolve and we enter into it.

How, then, are we to build the kingdom of Heaven? We are to strive unceasingly and with all our power, despite the Devil of superstition, ignorance and sloth, for the establishment of Love, Beauty and Truth—which three are Truth itself, for which man has sought from the beginning, not realising that Truth is the third of a Trinity, proceeding equally from Love, the Originator, and Beauty, the Child.



## CHAPTER XXII

As I SAID earlier, the fact that I, in spite of holding such a belief, could become a priest must seem like anticlimax. But certainly it is not. The Christian priesthood did not begin with Jesus and the Apostles. Jesus Himself was a priest; the fact of His priesthood is proved by His having access to the Temple at Jerusalem and His having both offered incense in the Holy of Holies and taught the people. And His priesthood was derived ultimately from Moses, who was himself an Egyptian priest of the ancient wisdom.

I sought ordination from a bishop whose orders are derived from the Nestorian Church (the Church which, more than any other, retains the primitive belief and liturgy of Christianity). The validity of the Orders of this Church is not disputed even by Rome (who denies the validity, of course, of Anglican Orders). Thus my priesthood is derived through Jesus and Moses from Egypt, and I am linked through historical time with all those who have sought God and His Truth.

But I had another reason for seeking Orders that were incontestably valid. It was not my purpose to found a denomination and so add still further to the senseless division of religion, Christian or otherwise; my idea was to found a brotherhood of people who believed that their first duty was not selfishly to "save" their souls but to work for the establishment of Heaven on earth. It seemed to me that whereas the validity of my Orders would be of no interest whatever to

Protestants and non-Christians, it would be a matter of extreme importance to Catholic-minded people. I must be acceptable to all.

I cannot say that I have made a visible success of my project where founding a brotherhood is concerned. Perhaps the truth is, however, that what I have taught has caused people to think that since all men are already brothers, there is no real need for a religious fraternity. There should be no need even for a society. The fact that I use no label inhibits me from suggesting a label to others.

I did not see that clearly at the time of my ordination. When I did understand that in suggesting that people should join my society or brotherhood I was being illogical the question was: Should I revise my ideas in order to get rid of the inhibition? But I plainly could not do that and still try to cling to truth. There could be no compromise. Every time one assails truth in that way—being able, of course, to see it—one goes back many steps in evolution.

Consequently I and my following exist without a label. We have only one special service—the ancient Mass. It is preserved as a sacrament, because bread and wine are the fruit of the earth, which is the child of the sun, which is part of the cosmos, which is the *thinking* of God. Not only that, but the corn and the grape, from which the bread and the wine are derived, are the result of the union of sexes, and this generation is the “material” creation of God. Whence came the life which resulted in that generation? From God, of course. All life is of and from God. When I consecrate bread and wine, I adapt it for sacramental use, and I can say in very truth that these things are the physical body and blood of God.

But this sacrament is not imposed on my people.

It has no objective meaning—any more than the Roman Catholic Mass or the Protestant Communion has in reality. It has only such meaning as that it can be invested with by those who take part in the rite. It may mean everything or nothing. To me it is simply a convenient means of concentration, and supplies my people with a means of establishing “spiritual” communion among them.

Maybe, too, it enables them to establish communion with God. And if they care to think of the consecrated “elements” as the body and blood of Christ—either in the Catholic or in the Protestant sense—I would not object, for indeed they *are* His body and blood. All matter is ultimately the one thing—electricity, which is the energy of God—, and since there are no limits to the power of thought, there is no obstacle, save unbelief, to the consecration of these “elements” accordingly. The ancient words of consecration are used and with the ancient intention.

But this is not to say that I regard the Mass as being valuable other than in the sense already explained. It is not a propitiatory sacrifice, for God needs no sacrifice. The one valuable exercise is that of meditation, the conscious linking of the mind to God with the intention of breathing the breath of life, of obtaining strength—and much strength is needed to follow the “cult” of what Aldous Huxley, paraphrasing the Buddha, calls “non-attachment” to the superstitions on which our common life is based—and of seeking Truth.

But a life of passive resistance to the superstitions of mankind is not enough: We have a clear duty—the duty of countering superstition on every possible occasion and refuting the base suggestions that God is the hoary old rascal before whom orthodoxy bows

in abject humility and to whom she toadies for "salvation." We have to teach that no state, no Church, no institution of any kind has an entity or being. It is the superstition concerning state and Church that causes people to be subject to tyranny, exploitation, poverty, injustice and war; freedom cannot come until this is swept away.

The Church supports the state by means of its "*Render unto Caesar*" injunction, and naturally in most Western countries the state supports the Church in return. "*Render unto Caesar*" inevitably engenders belief in the divine right of kings and governors. In this country, although the superstitions appertaining to royalty are still extant and although people accord reverence to kings as though they are more deserving of honour than any other men, the average person would not be in the least doubt whether notorious monarchs such as Nero, Henry the Eighth of England, "bloody" Mary, the Stuarts or the modern Dictators, Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin, ruled, or rule, by divine appointment. It is a remarkable thing, too, that the divine right of kings and governments always applies only to one's own king or government; this shows the complete absurdity of the whole idea. Why compromise with a superstition? Why not, having got so far, cast it out altogether?

History teaches people very little. One may draw lurid pictures of the terrible tyranny of state and Church, of the thumbscrew, the rack and the stake, of legal and religious murders, of the most appalling sadism in the name of religion and the most frightful injustice perpetrated at the whims of kings and governors; one may point out that Christianity has been responsible for more bloodshed in war than any other single cause; and yet the "ordinary man" will cling

to his superstition that he must not disturb the existing order of things. For to him God Himself is presented as a king, with angel courtiers, awful in His majesty, angered by disobedience, piqued when He is not accorded worship and reverence, weighing men in the balance and condemning them to everlasting punishment for sin—which, in the Church's pagan eyes, is chiefly concerned with sex! Small wonder that, obsessed with superstitious fear because of this grotesque picture of the Jewish Jehovah, men should feel that earthly kings and governors on the same model are divinely appointed and therefore must be accorded worship.

On the other hand, there is the indubitable fact that even in a so-called civilisation such as ours, over fifty per cent of the people are not mentally superior to Hottentots or even aborigines. It is the example of their superiors, fear of the law, and compulsory education and the general imposition of discipline which make them conform to a standard of "respectability." And a very much bigger percentage of the population are immersed in crude materialistic selfishness and personal ambitions that are kept in check only by the law imposed in the past to protect the ill-gained property of those in power. Is it, after all, a good thing to cure the majority of the race of superstitions which enslave them and yet prevent them from becoming an even worse menace to their fellow-men?

It is wise not to blink the facts—to recognise, that is, the nature and the outlook of one's fellow-beings. The London of to-day, greatest city on earth, well-governed, efficiently policed and with all the amenities (except noiselessness and freedom from congestion) that a city can hope for, is, when all is said and done,

nothing but a mass of men feverishly trying to make money at all costs. The majority of them, for their own sakes, keep on the right side of the law, but this does not prevent them from indulging in ruthless competition, the most shameful exploitation, callous gambling with lives and property and abominable lying and misrepresentation. Friend competes with friend, brother with brother—not that that is morally any worse than competition for profit between entire strangers; the point is that even natural affection is not strong enough to counteract the greed for gold. The mad scramble for wealth is regarded as healthy; we are even told that it is good for the country at large—that is, for people in general. There is about as much truth in that as there is in the idea that statesmen are backed by public opinion when newspapers support them; the truth in that case is, of course, that it is not even the editors and leader-writers of newspapers who are supporting the Government in such circumstances; staff-journalists, as hirelings, have to voice their employers' views.

I cannot at the end of this book try to develop an argument which needs a volume to itself, and so I must not go on in that strain. The point I am getting at is this, that as a realist I am faced with doubt whether it would be a wise thing to remove superstitions that effect some check on the ruthless rapacity of men. The law that was made for the security of those who, in the beginning, despoiled their fellows certainly is turned to a good purpose now in that respect and the superstition of the divine appointment or sanction of civil authority gives the law a sacred character.

Yet our best thinkers agree that the present system is entirely wrong and that men should be weaned from their superstitions. Also, of course, is the fact that

good ends are never justified by evil means; and perpetrating a superstition is undoubtedly gross evil.

I suppose the answer is that education on the right lines would both remove the superstitions and provide a check on rapacity. The plain duty of those of us who think on these lines is, therefore, unceasingly to preach this gospel—the gospel of opposition to Mammon, which is, of course, the Gospel of Jesus—so that we may do what we can consciously to accelerate the painfully slow progress of evolution.

I have mentioned elsewhere that the aim of Jesus was more than a political one. It was to teach the Higher Righteousness to those capable of emancipating themselves from the necessity for law. I believe that His intention was, as He said, not to destroy the law, since this is essential to the unenlightened, but to show those who were capable of receiving His doctrine that all law is a mere expedient. He was, as the so-called apocryphal gospels show, as much opposed to the Jewish Church as to the Roman state, as much opposed to religious law as to secular. For He recognised that a society of men—religious or secular—tend always to deify the society and to invest it with a spurious entity so that men are superstitiously prone to think that it has a special significance apart from the people who compose it and is worthy of respect, reverences or even worship. The consequence of this is that the brotherhood of man is divided into nations and religious sects, all more or less opposed to one another, and that the sins of pride, covetousness, hatred and murder flourish.

Patriotism and devotion to one's Church are acclaimed as virtues. How is it possible to be loyal to something that does not exist? The country or the Church is the people who comprise it; it has no entity. How can

either patriotism or devotion to a Church be a virtue, unless occasionally a virtue of necessity? Moreover, mankind is one, and God is concerned with, and manifests Himself in, all.

The religion of Jesus, as is so often said, is contained in the Sermon on the Mount. How is it possible for any nation as a nation or any religious sect to obey the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount? What nation could turn the other cheek to the aggressor, be humble or give double what is demanded, for instance? It would not survive as a nation if it attempted to be Christian. But that does not make Christian teaching wrong. The inference is that nationhood is wrong.

And does the Church attempt to be Christian? It could not exist if it renounced the world and worldly things, as Jesus did.

Until only a few years ago the funds of the Church of England were invested in armament firms. This idea is horrible to certain individual Christians (and to a greater number of non-Christians!) yet there is actually nothing illogical in the idea of the national Church's drawing revenue from the slaughter of men. She functions as the supporter of nationalism—of Mammon.

How far this mammonistic worship of a society, falsely invested with entity, can be carried is evidenced in the totalitarian states. Russia, Germany and Italy have completely deified the state. (This is true of Italy, even though Mussolini has struck a bargain with the Church, for in his eyes the Church is but a servant of the state. Has he not recently told Italian bishops that they must do all they can to urge people to have large families, for "big battalions" cannot be recruited otherwise? For what are the big



battalions? Surely not to promote the brotherhood of man!)

I do not believe in the *especial* divinity of Jesus, but I certainly do believe in His teaching. On the other hand, the institutional Church believes in the divinity of Jesus (which divinity He never, incidentally, claimed for Himself), but does not believe in His teaching. In other words, the Church is more concerned with preserving itself as an imagined entity (and no doubt with preserving its revenues paid by the faithful for the Church's spiritual service) than with preaching the Gospel that Jesus taught.

That remark about revenues prompts me to say that I cannot conceive anything more reprehensible, more appallingly cynical, than accepting payment for "administering religion." It was for that reason that when I was ordained I made a vow never to accept money for any priestly service that I might perform. I earn my living by literary work.

The average priest or parson would claim that he has adopted his calling for love of God, meaning "love of Christ" (rarely for the more meritorious motive of service to man), but at the very least, his motive must be suspect if he earns his living thereby. I do not suggest for an instant that clerics are conscious hypocrites in this respect; mostly they deceive themselves. But when an archbishop with an enormous income (how it is spent is quite beside the point) inaugurates a "recall to religion," one is fully entitled to be cynical. Moreover, his call is not that of an enthusiast in the cause of the people, which is the cause of God: he would say that he is acting for Christ's sake.

That famous "recall to religion" in the circumstances, was suggestive of a tradesman making an appeal to lapsed customers to patronise him anew!

Whether a cleric's income from his "religious" work be big or small, he cannot be called single-minded unless, like Paul, he works for his living. I have no patience with, nor can I believe in the sincerity of, any parson who is paid to minister and preach, and this applies equally to those who, of the Francis of Assisi type, beg for their daily bread. They beg for Christ's sake and because they are "religious"; there is no difference between begging your bread for Christ's sake or buying it with emoluments gained for ministering in His name.

I live in a country village in which there is no church. The people regard me as one of themselves. They complain that their orthodox parsons live aloof from the world, on a different plane; these reverend gentlemen know nothing whatever of the minds of those to whom they minister. Furthermore, they tend to support the established order of things and preach the contradictory doctrine that, God having ordained our circumstances, we must do our "duty in that state of life" in which we are placed, to conduct ourselves "lowly and reverently to all our betters," and that in the next life we shall, if we are good, be recompensed for all our poverty, pain and sorrow now. If these reverend gentleman are called to minister to the sick and dying they do so for Christ's sake, not for those of the sufferers, and they give "spiritual" counsel in accordance with the doctrine of the Church in a mechanical way, entirely unmoved by the squalor, degradation, ignorance and poverty which they encounter.

I do not profess to be a lover of humanity—I do not believe that any sane man could truthfully profess such a love. Certainly Jesus did not. He did not mince His words when He spoke to those whom He loathed and despised. But He could and did pity the blind leaders of

the blind—pity them even when He knew how they battered on their victims.

I do not profess to love all my fellow men, I say boldly therefore. I am ashamed of the dreadful past of our race—ashamed because dimly I feel that it is part of me—, of the intolerance and oppression which my countrymen of old inflicted both on themselves and on those whom they conquered. I am horrified to think that I am of the race of men who could burn men because of their religious beliefs, who could torture by pulling men's bones slowly apart, or by crushing their feet or thumbs and by inflicting other unnameable horrors on fellow beings not even by way of punishment but in order to make them confess to evil.

For, you see, I realise that I am a part of them, living and dead, and that together we represent the Son of God.

Is one any the less affected when one looks at present day conditions—at the hypocrisy of the British invoking international law against those nations which dare to do what she did not very long ago; at the persecutions, the torturings and the murders of the totalitarian states—the very apotheoses of Mammon—; at the legal grinding of the faces of the poor and the glorification and ennoblement of their exploiters; at the appalling ugliness which commercialism forces upon us; at the imbecility and the blindness of men?

*Of course* I am intolerant. Only the maudlin and the hypocrite could pretend to love humanity when humanity in the mass is corrupt. Not one man in a million even knows what truth is—and truth is the ultimate ideal incorporating both love and beauty—, much less tries to find it.

To say such things as these is, I suppose, to risk condemnation as a prig. It is a risk one must take.

Similarly, what Aldous Huxley said in *Ends and Means* was called puritanical by St. John Ervine. Such a critic judged from an entirely different standard, and hence his judgment is not valid. Nevertheless, from whatever standard one judges, I cannot see why these remarks should be priggish. After all, in putting forward such unpopular ideas I am scarcely hoping to be commended, nor do I want to be commended, and I certainly do not believe that I am going to be rewarded hereafter because I hold this point of view and live accordingly.

And maybe, in any case, I am entirely wrong! I am no more impressed by my own mere opinions than I am with other people's—for opinions on this matter cannot be backed by proof of their reasonableness. I may be wrong. Life may, after all, be quite meaningless. But even so, since one day I have to end this physical existence I shall be, at the least, no worse off than anyone who has aspired to worldly eminence and gained it.

But these opinions are mine, and believing them to be sound, I live accordingly. This much, at all events, I know, that if there were no aspiration for worldly aggrandisement there would be far less misery on earth. Surely that is justification enough?

A man must live according to his own creed or code. I have lived fully, making and destroying, killing and procreating, idealising and realising futility. I have been journalist, soldier, author, priest. And now I am past the normal half-way mark of life, though still active. If war came once more and if we English had to fight for what little liberty we have against those who would take it from us I suppose that I should become a soldier again. I am, not, you see, a pacifist, for I do not think that human life is sacred. I might think it sacred if I thought

it were the only life; believing as I do, I think it is only a day at school.

I have never met an out-and-out pacifist who was not primarily inspired, not by dislike of taking another's life, but by regard for his own.

But I should not fight in a cause such as that of the last war—which was, of course, primarily to preserve the empire—for, unable as we are to make the most of those enormous possessions of ours, I do not consider we are right to hold them against people who could, and doubtless would, use them properly. When I think of Australia and Canada, each as big as over-crowded Europe and yet with fewer inhabitants than London has, I cannot possibly subscribe to the idea that we must hold these at all costs.

This, then, is a very brief survey of my belief. I reject the teaching of the institutional Church because I cannot conceive that "salvation" is dependent on belief in a traditional idea—an idea that could have been, and undoubtedly has been, distorted out of all resemblance to its original, and which, as we know it, is both opposed to reason and unsupported by the available evidence. The fruit of subscription to this idea is a conception of life which is directly antagonistic to true charity and the development of a free conscience.

Mere belief is, in any case, of no use to anyone. The test of belief is acting in consonance with it; it is not real otherwise. But that is not in accordance with Christian teaching, plain fact though it be.

No man ever yet "saved" his soul consciously, for whoever tries to do so is inspired by self-seeking, which is the greatest of all sins. Eternal life is God's gift to those who are able to lose all desire save the desire for knowledge and for the betterment of the world. But I do not say that those who are incapable of this selfless

outlook are damned. If that were so, ninety-nine per cent of the human race would have no chance of survival. That not all people are of the same "soul-age" is obvious. In this country of ours many thousands of years of spiritual evolution separate the highest from the lowest. Many reincarnations will be necessary before the latter have equality of mental opportunity with the others. Do you doubt that? If you do, you will fail to find in any other idea an explanation of the spiritual and mental differences among men. If you doubt that, and if you believe in a Heaven hereafter, you will be compelled to subscribe to the notion that in the life-to-come inequality will be as rife as it is here, for it is highly improbable that in "the twinkling of an eye" God will invest Dr. Inge's cook with a mind similar to that of Dr. Inge—I have used that illustration before, so I might as well use it again. Mind is the result of experience; it can never be a gift from God. In due course Dr. Inge's cook will arrive at Dr. Inge's mental age—how many reincarnations (or shall we say, lives?) on this planet or elsewhere will be required in order that she may undergo the necessary experience I do not pretend to know.

But at any stage of this evolutionary process a man may, by a refusal to learn, disqualify himself and drop out of the running. Only God can know who are thus damned, for it is not possible for us to look into the minds of men and read what motivates their actions. The rest must go on, unconsciously winning eternal life by losing all the desires which chain them to earth.

"*Whosoever shall seek to gain his life,*" says the Gospel according to St. Luke, "*shall lose it: but whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it*" (Revised Version).

And "*Who seeks his kingdom,*" says the Gospel according to the Hebrews (Clem. Alex. *Strom.* II, 9, 45) "*must*

*never cease until he has found it, and when he has found it, he will wonder, and lost in wonder, he will become a king, and as sovereign will finally win rest."*

For "*the kingdom*" is within. Not until a man can look upon the things of earth with the eyes of God and invest them with beauty, love and truth is he able to discern the Heaven to which he aspires; for then he will have learnt how to project into the world *the Heaven that is within him.*

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